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The Foundation of a General Theory of Translation
Built on the Semiotics of C.S. Peirce

Ubaldo STECCONI

University College London
Ph.D. in Comparative Literature
January 2006

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Abstract

Translation studies is a young discipline in search of a sound theoretical basis. In the past half century, translation scholars have turned to linguistics (general linguistics, discourse analysis, corpus linguistics), game theory, comparative literature, cultural studies, cognitive sciences, and memetics—just to cite the main approaches. As a result, translation studies is clearly emerging as an interdiscipline, yet there seems to be no consensus on the core question: “what do we talk about when we talk about translation?” The present study puts forward Peirce’s semiotics as a theory around which such consensus may be found.

My starting hypothesis is that all translation is semiosis but not all semiosis is translation; ie, translating is a special case of sign–action which occurs under conditions of its own. I will test this hypothesis using insights from Peirce’s semiotic writings. My main conclusion is a two–layered model: the outer layer brings together what I call the Foundation of translation, translation events, and translation norms. Following Peirce’s metaphysics, these elements correspond to the firstness, secondness and thirdness of translation semiosis. The inner layer zooms in on the Foundation. There, another triad can be found: similarity, difference, and mediation. These characters are the logico–semiotic *conditions* that would allow one to trace an edge for translating among other forms of sign–action.

The latter part of this work explores the phenomenology of translation. Key notions from Relevance theory are used to sketch a general theory of translators’ intentions. Upon interpreting translated signs, one may attribute three classes of intentions to a translator: a desire to play *interpres*, motives for the translation project, and a translation strategy. This leads to a discussion of translation agency. The proposal to replace ‘wave’ to ‘transfer’ as the core trope for translation rounds up the present work.

Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	6
1 Introduction	7
1.1 <i>Looking for translation</i>	7
1.2 <i>Plan of the work</i>	11
1.2.1 Description of chapters	13
2 What you always Wanted to Know about Peirce (and never Dared to Ask)	15
2.1 <i>An apology of semiotics for research in translation</i>	15
2.2 <i>What is a sign</i>	16
2.2.1 The breadth of the concept of semiosis	18
2.2.2 Application: investigating translation events	19
2.2.3 Three's a sign: the triad is indivisible	20
2.2.4 Application: a viable model for T-semiosis	22
2.3 <i>How signs work: Ground and goal</i>	23
2.3.1 Application: the viewpoint theory of equivalence	24
2.4 <i>The categories</i>	25
2.4.1 Secondness and thirdness	28
2.5 <i>The object</i>	30
2.5.1 Application: originals are larger than translations	32
2.6 <i>The theory of the interpretant</i>	33
2.6.1 The sign 'determines' the interpretant	34
2.6.2 Application: an idea of equivalence based on inference	35
2.7 <i>Habits and beliefs</i>	37
2.7.1 Application: translators' habits	38
2.8 <i>Semiosis and truth</i>	39
2.8.1 Application: translations are larger than originals	41
2.9 <i>The theory of investigation</i>	42
2.9.1 Induction and deduction	43
2.9.2 Problems with the induction–deduction opposition in T-semiosis	44
2.9.3 Abduction	45
2.9.4 The mature model: abduction—deduction—induction	46
2.10 <i>Elements of classification</i>	48
2.10.1 Sign <i>per se</i>	50
2.10.2 Sign–Object	51
2.10.3 Indexical signs and weathervanes	52
2.10.4 Sign–Interpretant	53

2.11	<i>Summary</i>	53
2.12	<i>Appendix: truth, reality and the community</i>	54
2.12.1	<i>Application: what are translation norms?</i>	58
3	Review of the Literature	62
3.1	<i>Introduction</i>	62
3.2	<i>Jakobson. The beginning</i>	64
3.3	<i>Early voices</i>	67
3.3.1	<i>Ludskanov</i>	67
3.3.2	<i>Lawendowski</i>	69
3.3.3	<i>Van Kesteren</i>	70
3.4	<i>Toury. A proto–Peircean approach</i>	72
3.5	<i>False trails</i>	78
3.6	<i>Restricted applications</i>	82
3.6.1	<i>Adab</i>	82
3.6.2	<i>The Kouvola centre</i>	84
3.7	<i>Deledalle–Rhodes. Broadening the scope</i>	86
3.8	<i>Gorlée. A landmark in the semiotics of translation</i>	91
3.8.1	<i>Semiotics and the Problem of Translation</i>	92
3.8.2	<i>On Translating Signs</i>	97
3.9	<i>Cosculluela. A general triadic model</i>	100
3.10	<i>Torop. The man who has read all the books</i>	107
3.11	<i>Petrilli. The state of play</i>	111
3.11.1	<i>“Translation and Semiosis”</i>	112
3.11.2	<i>“The intersemiotic character”</i>	115
3.12	<i>T.L. Short. Semiosis is not unlimited</i>	118
3.12.1	<i>Short on translation</i>	121
3.13	<i>Eco. Translation theory lite</i>	123
3.14	<i>Nergaard. Italy’s best translation scholar</i>	129
3.14.1	<i>“Un approccio semiotico alla traduzione multimediale”</i>	130
3.14.2	<i>Conclusions to Versus</i>	132
3.14.3	<i>“Semiotica interpretativa e traduzione”</i>	135
3.15	<i>Conclusions</i>	137
4	A General Theory of Translation: Core Notions	141
4.1	<i>The bet</i>	141
4.2	<i>Semiotics explains translation, not the other way round</i>	141
4.3	<i>T–semiosis: events, norms and Foundation</i>	143
4.3.1	<i>Events</i>	143
4.3.2	<i>Norms</i>	144
4.3.3	<i>Foundation</i>	146

4.4	<i>Three characters</i>	147
4.4.1	Similarity	148
4.4.2	Difference	149
4.4.3	Mediation	152
4.5	<i>Triadicity</i>	154
4.6	<i>Vagueness and generality</i>	155
4.7	<i>Similarity and identity</i>	156
5	Relevance Theory and T–Semiosis	158
5.1	<i>The need to bring semiotics down to earth</i>	158
5.2	<i>The continuity between Relevance theory and semiotics</i>	159
5.3	<i>A critical sketch of Relevance theory</i>	166
5.3.1	Code v inference	168
5.3.2	Cognition	172
5.3.3	Communication	177
5.4	<i>Gutt's Relevance–theory approach to translation and interpreting</i>	185
5.5	<i>Relevance theory for T–semiosis</i>	197
5.5.1	ToM: an experiment with Calvino	197
5.5.2	Informative and communicative intentions	199
5.5.3	Reading the minds of two agents	203
5.5.4	Reading the translator's mind	205
5.6	<i>Agency</i>	209
5.6.1	Who causes T–semiosis to happen?	210
5.6.2	Pull	211
5.6.3	Push	213
5.6.4	Shuffle	214
6	Five Reasons Why Semiotics is Good for Translation Studies	218
6.1	<i>Introduction</i>	218
6.2	<i>Saying</i>	219
6.3	<i>Thing</i>	222
6.4	<i>The same</i>	225
6.5	<i>Almost</i>	227
6.6	<i>Conclusion</i>	230
6.7	<i>Appendix: T–semiosis and continuity</i>	230
7	Conclusions	235
7.1	<i>Seven answers</i>	235
7.2	<i>A wave model for T–semiosis</i>	237
8	Bibliography	244

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Ubaldo Stecconi

Brussels, December 2005

1 Introduction

1.1 *Looking for translation*

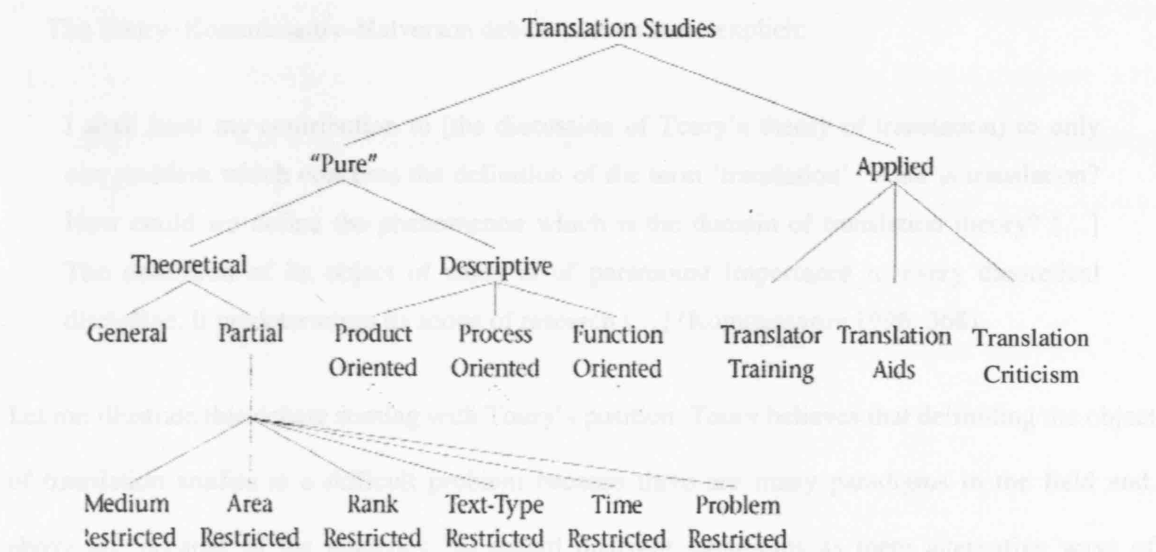
In the past four decades, translation scholars have turned to linguistics (general linguistics, discourse analysis, corpus linguistics), game theory, comparative literature, cultural studies, cognitive sciences, and memetics—just to cite the main approaches. As a result, translation research is clearly emerging as an interdiscipline, yet it seems to me that the centrifugal forces are stronger than the centripetal ones. The present study puts forward the mass of C.S. Peirce’s theory of signs as a barycentre that can organise various and sundry approaches around central conceptions proper to translation.

I will focus on one main conception: the very object of translation research. The issue is much debated by translation scholars. Earlier statements by Catford and Nida reduced the problem of translation to that of equivalence; here are two classic definitions: “Translation may be defined as follows: the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent material in another language (TL)” (Catford 1965: 20) and “Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message” (Nida and Taber 1969: 12). More recent attempts at specifying what translation research is about include Mariano García Landa (García-Landa 1995) and his peculiar version of semiotics; Ernst-August Gutt’s application of Relevance theory (Gutt 2000b, see 5.4 for a detailed discussion); Brian Mossop’s “quoting, in sequential chunks, of the wording of a written, oral or signed text, with an imitative purpose” (Mossop 1998: 231); Sandra Halverson (Halverson 1999) usage of cognitive universals; and Peeter Torop and Kalevi Kull’s expansion of the domain in which translation may happen to an organism’s *Umwelt*—ie, its model of the world (Torop and Kull 2003, esp. 318). I could go on indefinitely and the list would always be incomplete. It would also look more and more disparate, which points to a

potentially embarrassing conclusion: translation scholars do not agree on the simple question of what makes a translation a translation.

Why have we come to this? There are probably many reasons and most are linked to the fact that serious academic reflection on translation is a comparatively recent thing. However, I would like to single out the area known as ‘descriptive translation studies’ as an example of centrifugal force. Translation research took a new direction with a now famous conference in Leuven in 1976. The book that collects the proceeding of that conference (Holmes, Lambert, and Broeck 1978) can be regarded as the birth of a new paradigm called translation studies. Translation studies brought fresh and important insights, but its emphasis on the very large scale—such as the reception of translated literature in a culture or over a given period—, its bias towards literature, and its preference for descriptive approaches did little to help us understand translation’s core and distinctive features. This need not have been the case. The seminal paper in translation studies, “The Name and Nature of Translation Studies”, read by James S Holmes at the Third International Congress of Applied Linguistics in Copenhagen in August 1972 (Holmes 1988: 67–80, also reprised and commented in Toury 1995: 9ff) had already mapped the field as follows:

Figure 1: The Toury–Holmes’ map for translation studies (diagram scanned from Toury 1995: 10)



As it happened, work on the theoretical branches has since lagged behind, especially along the ‘pure’→theoretical→general branch. In my view, the very success of descriptivism is part of the reason why leading translation scholars do not seem to agree on what makes a translation a translation. This dissertation will try to cover the distance towards the westernmost tip of Holmes’s map using interpretive semiotics as its theoretical frame of reference.

Two recent debates hosted by *Target* have brought the object–of–study issue into sharper focus: the ‘Forum on Shared Ground in Translation Studies’ that ran between 2000 and 2002 (issues 12:1 to 14:1) and two important contributions by Vilen Kommissarov (Kommissarov 1996) and Sandra Halverson (Halverson 2005) discussing Toury’s notion of ‘assumed translation’ (as explained, for instance, in Toury 1995: 31–39 and *passim*).

The Forum on Shared Ground clearly expressed the wish to formulate a unifying theory for translation studies. Bringing that debate to a close, Arrojo wrote of an “underlying desire that Translation Studies could in fact become a unified discipline, where everyone could agree at least on essential premises and goals...” (Arrojo 2002: 138). These premisses are simply stated: “...we should at least know exactly what all of us are talking about when we talk about translation, the very object of our inquiry” (Ibid.). In all fairness, Arrojo raised the point to dismiss it, but I intend to take up her challenge.

The Toury–Kommissarov–Halverson debate is even more explicit:

I shall limit my contribution to [the discussion of Toury’s theory of translation] to only one problem which concerns the definition of the term ‘translation’. What is translation? How could we define the phenomenon which is the domain of translation theory? [...] The definition of its object of study is of paramount importance to every theoretical discipline. It predetermines its scope of research [...] (Kommissarov 1996: 368).

Let me illustrate this debate starting with Toury’s position. Toury believes that delimiting the object of translation studies is a difficult problem because there are many paradigms in the field and, above all, because of the tendency “to regard different paradigms as mere alternative ways of

dealing with ‘the same thing’. Which they are not, nor can we expect them to be. [...] Establishing an object of study is necessarily a function of the *theory* in whose terms it is constituted” (Ibid.). We can situate Toury in the idealist camp (see 3.4 below for a discussion of Toury’s theory, especially his three ‘postulates’).

In contrast, Kommissarov believes that “the object of study is an objective entity which a theory tries to account for from a definite point of view, wholly or partially” (Kommissarov 1996: 365). We can situate Kommissarov in the realist camp. According to him, a good definition of translation should be i) restrictive enough to allow us to tell translations from nontranslations and ii) broad enough to include all cases of translation (cf. Id.: 369). Eventually, Kommissarov teleologically defines translation as the “production of a text in the target language designed to serve as a plenipotentiary representative of the source text in all respects—functionally, semantically and structurally” (Id.: 370, see 4.4.3 for this definition in the context of my model).

Halverson is quick to notice this philosophical clash, although she describes it in terms of objectivism or essentialism (cf. Halverson 2005: 341). After showing that Kommissarov’s definition falls short of both his own criteria, she proposes a method for establishing the object of translation theory using Searle’s notion of ‘institutional facts’—those that exist only by human agreement, like money—and Putnam’s ‘division of intellectual labor’. This allows Halverson to take apart some of Toury’s and Kommissarov’s claims and to piece them again together under Searle’s ontology, which controversially and originally combines realist and idealist traits (see 2.12 for a discussion of how Peirce had overcome this distinction). Halverson concludes that translation is an institutional fact crucially identified by experts and accepted as such by society in general (cf. Halverson 2005: 352–3).

Apart from this intriguing conclusion, I believe Halverson’s best insight is her analysis of the disagreement between Kommissarov and Toury. The author reminds us that sometimes cultures do not agree on the status of certain institutional facts. These are cases in which—using Searle’s terminology:

[C]ollective intentionality is at risk and in which there is disagreement about the legitimacy of identifying claims. [...] There are consequences for scientific progress when identification claims are contested and the legitimacy of those making identifications is questioned. This is the current situation in Translation Studies and the source of the difference between Toury and Kommissarov (Id.: 349–350).

Both the Shared Ground and the Toury–Kommissarov–Halverson debates stress the sociology of translation studies, to which Halverson brings her strong philosophical equipment. I agree that the scholarly quest for a unifying notion of translation is driven by social forces and—I would add—professional aspirations. But if the end is establishing and reinforcing translation research, the means must involve steering it towards basic theory because translation scholars can find a consensus among themselves (and the respect of their colleagues) only by filling the hollow theoretical core of the field. I believe interpretive semiotics can help us do just that.

Before I proceed, I need to specify that by ‘interpretive semiotics’ I mean the theory of signs developed by the American polymath C.S. Peirce (1839–1914) and followed by Morris, Sebeok, Eco, and others as opposed to the tradition initiated by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913)—sometimes labelled *sémiologie*—and followed by Lotman, Barthes, Greimas, and others. The distinction between the two semiotic traditions is not clear-cut. A quick characterisation is as follows: Peirce focussed on sign interpretation and on how a culture produces and gives currency to signs. Saussure focussed on the structural aspects of sign systems and signification. From now on, when I write ‘semiotics’, ‘semiosis’, etc. I will refer only to the former.

1.2 Plan of the work

Like Toury, Kommissarov, and mostly everyone else who tried, I too am aware that identifying translation in general is a difficult task. This is mainly due to two reasons: i) a translator is typically engaged in a complex set of operations some of which are not specific to translation at all; and ii) if you look at translation from certain points of view, it resembles many other semiotic operations. Let

me give you a trivial example of the first problem: most translators nowadays would be out of work if they did not know how to operate a computer; yet computer skills can hardly be regarded as constitutive of translation. The second problem can be exemplified by the list of items André Lefevere included under his ‘rewriting’ heading: translation, anthologization, historiography, criticism and editing (cf. Lefevere 1992). All these entries have an air of family resemblance about them, but how can one tell translation from its siblings?

From a semiotic perspective, driving translation research towards its theoretical core involves identifying translating as a typical—and hopefully unique—form of sign-action (or semiosis). The fact that translating is semiotic in nature should be beyond contention. Asking whether it is a *specific* form of semiosis is much more problematic: How can one demarcate translation semiosis (T-semiosis for short) within semiosis in general with a sufficient degree of precision? In a typical move for interpretive semiotics, my argument relies at the start on hypothetical reasoning (Peirce called it ‘abduction’ in his lugubrious terminology). I will turn the above question into my main hypothesis: “*what if* translating is a special form of semiosis?” Because making a hypothesis is like placing a bet, I bet that all translation is semiosis but not all semiosis is translation. But this implies that T-semiosis occurs under conditions of its own; the main objective of this study thus becomes a quest for these conditions.

I will look for them in the elusive domain Peirce called firstness, which is populated by vague and potential entities. Clearly, this means that whatever I find there cannot be regarded as a checklist of positive and universal features we can readily use to tell translations from nontranslations. In fact, it can be shown that any such checklist is doomed to failure.

T-semiosis cannot occur if certain semiotic conditions do not hold, but when it does it is an event locally determined by actual circumstances and regulated by the norms prevailing at a given point of the space-time continuum—including the social agreements that identify certain semiotic entities as translations. Telling a translation from a nontranslation is a decision that finds its own

criteria as it is being taken and these criteria should account for conditions, events and norms at once.

Talking of events and norms reminds us that translating does not grow on trees; it is people who make it happen. Provided that T-semiosis is distinct from other forms of semiosis, the individuals and groups that are involved in it should also be engaged in something special. The second objective of this study is therefore the search for special translatorial states of mind in the most abstract and general terms.

1.2.1 Description of chapters

It is not going to be easy to carry out this work plan, especially because Peirce's eccentric ideas and style of argumentation do not win many friends. Although there is a sizeable body of literature, exploring the nexus of semiotics and translation theory is still a specialty field. Therefore, chapter 2 will sketch a map of semiotics for translation scholars. Peirce's vast architectonics is stripped down to the bare essentials: the conceptions of semiosis and sign, the existential categories, habit, the theory of investigation and the classification of signs. The relevance of most of these conceptions to translation theory will be illustrated as soon as they are introduced. These applicative sections will give a first taste of what semiotics can do for translation research; the topics include product v process, equivalence and loss, and a glimpse inside the little black box.

The existing body of literature on the semiotics of translation is reviewed in chapter 3, which covers semiotically inclined translation scholars and translation-loving semioticians (these labels are wearing increasingly thin). As I was putting together the chapter, I noticed that semiotics kept popping up at some seminal locations in translation research and wondered why these promising beginnings did not take deeper roots in our field of study.

Chapter 4 is the core of the present dissertation. In it, I introduce translation semiosis as the form of semiosis that is specific of translation and the Foundation of translation as the set of its

conditions. Thanks to the Foundation, one can trace an edge for T-semiosis amid all possible forms of sign-action. This conception is categorially distinct from the sets of norms and habits that define and regulate translation in certain portions of the time-space continuum. It is also distinct from actual translation events, such as translating, evaluating a translation, and deciding whether a text is indeed a translation.

For the most part, you can describe the present work as metaphysical. Only in chapter 5 will you find a shift of focus towards phenomenology. The shift carries with it a change from the theoretical framework of semiotics to that of Relevance theory. The chapter is in three movements and a coda: i) an argument for the continuity of Relevance theory and Peirce's semiotics; ii) a review and criticism of E.-A. Gutt's application of Relevance theory to translation research; and iii) the sketch of a model for translators' intentions. I believe that the states of mind of the agents involved in T-semiosis can be investigated in general and abstract terms. A discussion of translation agency rounds up the chapter.

Earlier on I stated that the arguments presented in this work move from hypothetical reasoning. Although, the 'what if' game gives you better chances than the lottery, still it is essentially like betting. I could not release this work into the semiosphere without running a preliminary test—no matter how small—on my main findings. This I do in chapter 6, where I take the phrase 'Saying Almost the Same Thing'—which is Umberto Eco's idea of what translation is about—and analyse it term by term. The chapter finds five reasons why semiotics is good for translation research.

It will be clear by now that you are not going to read a conventional dissertation. Its last, deliberate peculiarity is the introduction of fresh material in the conclusions. There, I put forward a new figural domain as an alternative to the transfer trope, which has been the blessing and curse of translators for a very long time.

2 What you always Wanted to Know about Peirce (and never Dared to Ask)

2.1 An apology of semiotics for research in translation

Peirce's semiotics can contribute a lot to the theory of translation for a number of reasons. Firstly, semiotic's core notions are extremely parsimonious and can be applied recursively over several scales of complexity. Following a typical argument by Peirce is like watching a crystal grow. Therefore, one unified theory can deal with tiny details such as the moving parts inside 'the little black box' as well as grand issues such as the ontological status of norms. Secondly, Peirce built his theory of signs on a decidedly original metaphysics which can break the deadlock between empirical and descriptivist approaches on the one hand and approaches based on translation axioms on the other. Finally, Peirce did not develop his theory with any specific type of sign in mind; above all semiotics is not centred on verbal language. Thus, it can respond to the increasing interest in nonverbal signs both in the academic study and in the practice of translation. These are just some of the reasons why I think semiotics is good for translation research.

In this chapter, I will sketch a map that translation scholars can use to find their bearings in the rest of the present study (cf. Stecconi 2004b). Peirce was a decidedly unconventional thinker whose genius came at the price of obscure and sometimes contradictory positions. This map covers those territories of Peirce's doctrine I found useful for translation theory. It will include a discussion of what Peirce meant by semiosis and signs together with a description of the sign's internal elements and of their roles in sign-action. It will then move on to Peirce's existential categories, his notion of object, the theory of the interpretant, and habit. Finally, you will find a discussion of Peirce's theory of investigation and of his classification of signs. A survey of Peirce's conception of truth and reality and a suggestion for the ontological status of translation norms will be found in appendix. The illustration of Peirce's theory of signs will be interspersed with applicative sections that bring it

to bear on some issues that stir the blood of translation scholars. These will touch upon the product vs. process issue, the triadic nature of translation, implications of the conception of skopos, equivalence, and the relative position of source and target texts.

2.2 *What is a sign*

What is semiotics about? I can give you two answers:

1. Semiotics is the discipline that studies the sign. This is anything that represents something else for an interpreting mind.
2. Semiotics is the discipline that studies sign–action. This is what we do when we interpret anything as representing something else under a certain respect.

Even in this extremely simplified form, the difference between the two answers is clear: 1. describes object–like entities; 2. is about an event. Both statements are valid, because they basically address the same question from different viewpoints. However, the choice between the object–based and the event–based viewpoint is not trivial nor is it a matter of taste. There is a trend in recent semiotic scholarship that prefers the latter. Annamaria Lorusso writes that “the definition of sign has never been easy nor straightforward” (Lorusso 2005: 11, my translation). The main reason is that a sign is anything that can be interpreted as such. “Signs do not have definite material content nor a fixed signification; the identity of a sign is processual, contextual, and interpretive” (Id. 13). Therefore, “[t]he category of sign [...] turned out to be inadequate—either too strict or too general—and the preference went towards a definition of semiotics in the terms of the category of signification”. Thomas L. Short had already added his authoritative voice to this debate: “The basic concept of semeiotic is not that of sign but is that of semeiosis” (Short 1986: 105). Semeiosis or sign–action is a broader concept than signification, which is the process whereby signs produce meaning. However, the preference towards what signs do and what we do with signs is clear. I will follow this trend: in the present study, I will assume that signs happen.

Both answers also have something in common: the idea that three elements are required to give a minimum account of semiosis: a sign, something the sign stands for, and something else (usually someone else) that interprets it. This is in sharp contrast with other approaches that explain language and communication in terms of dyadic relations; namely, the relation that links words to ideas. I'll take Saussure's position as the most representative; the Swiss father of modern linguistics believed that there was an arbitrary and conventional relationship between the mental representations of certain portions of the world and the mental images of language elements.¹

Peirce painted a different picture.

I will say that a sign is anything, of whatsoever mode of being, which mediates between an object and an interpretant; since it is both determined by the object *relatively to the interpretant*, and determining the interpretant *in reference to the object*, in such wise as to cause the interpretant to be determined by the object through the mediation of this "sign" (Peirce 1992–1998: 410).

This quotation is from MS 318 of 1907 and is one of Peirce's best definitions of sign, but it is certainly not the clearest. Before I explain its terms, please be advised that Peirce uses the verb 'determine' as synonymous to 'delimit' (on the special meaning of 'determination' see 2.6.1 below) and that the two relations between object and sign and between sign and interpretant are elucidated with the help of the terms 'ground' and 'goal' in section 2.3 below. The quotation says that there is an entity called **object** which affects the sign more or less like a stimulus would. It does not matter whether the objects come from the world 'out there' or the inner world within our minds. The **interpretant** is the effect of the sign, it is normally (but not necessarily) produced in the mind of an interpreter and is normally (but not necessarily) itself a sign. Thanks to these 'determinations', the

¹ I am aware of De Mauro's warnings against the risk of spreading an over-simplified and inaccurate *vulgata* of Saussure's thought. It is a fact that—in addition to the dichotomies everyone is familiar with—Saussure also insisted on the distinction between "*signifié* as a value of and in the language (*langue*) and *signification* or *sens* as the actualisation of this value in speech (*parole*)" (cf. De Mauro's introduction to Saussure 2005: XVI, my translation).

object affects the interpretant via the **sign**. So, unlike Saussure's, Peirce's sign is composed of three elements not two. The above quotation is convoluted because Peirce wanted to show that the two 'determinations' are neither independent of each other nor successive. In fact, they depend on each other and are parts of one continuous event. Paradoxically, there is some uncertainty on the term 'sign' both in Peirce and among semioticians. Robert Marty counted 76 definitions in Peirce's writings, with 12 further definitions or equivalents appended by Alfred Lang (Marty 1997). Some semioticians, like Gérard Deledalle (Deledalle 1990), use the term 'sign' for the complete set of three elements and *representamen* only for the mediating 'vehicle'. This position is not unreasonable, but I prefer the more familiar terms object, sign and interpretant for the components of sign-action or semiosis.

I would like to illustrate the continuous nature of the sign's inner working with an example. Imagine you are camping outdoors. Night falls, you leave the fire smoldering and go to sleep. Shortly before dawn, a chestnut falls from a tree, its husk breaks open and the nut rolls into the ash. When you wake up you can eat a perfectly roasted chestnut for breakfast. Now compare this story with someone roasting chestnuts in his fireplace for his friends. The practical outcome is the same, but the series of events is different. In the campsite the sequence was accidental and unconnected; in contrast, your friend lit the fire *to create the conditions* to roast chestnuts and placed them under the ash *in order to* eat them. In both cases you can eat roast chestnuts, but only the one you have in your friend's living-room results from continuous and deliberate action. This, not the chestnut that fell into the ashes by chance, is similar to the continuity and directionality that move signs from the inside.

2.2.1 The breadth of the concept of semiosis

Semiosis or sign-action is a very abstract and general conception. The following examples can give you an idea of the breadth of its scope of applicability.

1. You say: “It’s raining”. I interpret the utterance to stand for the weather outside. The rain (object), your utterance (sign), and what I make of it (interpretant) are elements of semiosis based on inference and convention, which is public by definition.
2. I come home one evening and notice that my TV set is missing. The supposed burglary (object), the now–empty space on the shelf (sign), and my conclusion that I am the victim of a burglar (interpretant) are elements of semiosis based on private inference.
3. The wind shifts and the weathervane on top of the roof turns. The direction of the wind (object) and the weathervane (sign) are two elements of semiosis based on a cause–effect relation.

The main difference between the above examples is that 1. and 2. include three elements, whereas 3. includes only two. Example 3. is a kind of semiosis called indexical in which the vane turns regardless of the action of an interpreting mind. Of course, I can turn my eyes to the vane to see whence the wind is blowing, but the vane turns regardless of my observation. I will explain in which sense a weathervane can be conceived as a form of sign–action in 2.10.3 below.

2.2.2 Application: investigating translation events

Peirce’s theory of signs is an account of actions, events and relations, not of objects, functions and features. All the elements of his mature system move in a flux. He coined a term for it—“synechism”—which is Greek for continuity. This is in contrast with structural approaches, which offer accounts of static systems. This is Peirce’s damning beauty. It is beautiful because synechism corresponds to the continuity of natural and cultural reality; it is damning because it makes the system difficult to grasp and communicate. Although our communicative and cultural habits are often inadequate to represent a flux, let me try to illustrate a first application of the expression ‘signs happen’ for translation scholarship.

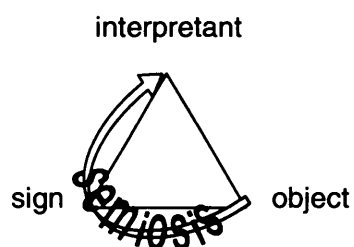
We often distinguish our discourse into process and product; ie, translating and translated texts. I would like to apply the primacy of sign–action over signs to draw a methodological consequence

from this distinction. The kind of sign–action that is carried out by translators (translation semiosis or T–semiosis for short) is a more originary conception than the entities involved: originals, collateral information, translations, etc. Methodologically, I suggest that translation research would be more effective if it regarded observable elements of translation as traces, symptoms, and indications of T–semiosis. Collectively, the observable elements point to the really interesting and pertinent object of investigation, which is translation’s specific events and actions. Empirically, it is obvious that translations exist because acts of translating brought them into being. This applies to originals as well, although they were necessarily around before someone translated them. Anything that can be translated is potentially an original, but it actually becomes one only when it is part of a translation process. It follows that both the translated text and the original *qua* original are, in a sense, translation products.

2.2.3 Three’s a sign: the triad is indivisible

We have just seen that semiotics’ originary notion is an act which, in its genuine form, involves three elements. Let us reprise the example of someone who steps into the room and says “It’s raining”. Let me repeat that her utterance is a sign, the rain outside is its object and whatever other people can make of it is its interpretant. Sign, object and interpretant are commonly represented around a triangle like this:

Figure 1



It is of interest to note that Peirce coined the term interpretant thinking of oral translation: “Such a mediating representation may be termed an interpretant, because it fulfils the office of an interpreter, who says that a foreigner says the same thing which he himself says” (CP 1.553, 1867).²

Because semiosis is one action and not the stacking of discrete parts one on top of another, the three elements are indivisible. “Remove a leg from the semiotic tripod, and it collapses” (Merrell 2002). Although indivisible, the parts are identifiable and distinct in a sign’s internal continuity. This means that the three elements are irreducible and the signs inherently trivalent. The idea of valency or dependency in grammar can help illustrate this point. The intransitive verb ‘rise’ admits only one valence, as in ____ rises. The transitive verb ‘eat’ implies two, as in ____ eats _____. The verb ‘give’ admits three, as in ____ gives ____ to _____. Genuine signs share this logical feature with verbs like ‘give’. They need all three corners of the triangle to exist. No element in the object–sign–interpretant series can be calculated away or disposed of in any way.

I can give you a more tangible description of the trivalence of genuine signs. It has to do with symptoms and diagnoses. What is the semiotic difference between the high fever I was down with in Manila a few years ago and the doctor’s report that I suffered from a dengue infection? The fever has—so to speak—two valences; the diagnosis three. The fever is ontologically complete in its action–reaction relations; it does not need anyone’s interpretation to exist and manifest itself. My doctor’s report, instead, was conceived with the intent to produce a “significate effect” (CP 5.475, c. 1906. The fever example also appears in the same article at CP 5.473). Its effect was one of its existential conditions; no such effect, no report. The fever, the report and its interpretation are the three corners of my doctor’s semiosis. In contrast, the dengue virus and the fever are only the endpoints of an action–reaction segment (the difference is also categorical, see 2.4 below). You may object that when my doctor saw me, the fever too acquired its interpretant. I agree, but that is

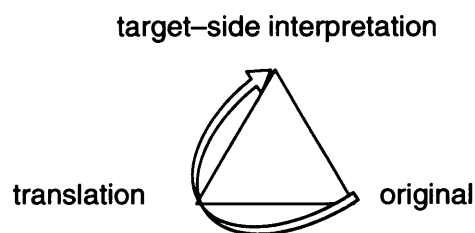
² All references to the Collected Papers of Charles S. Peirce (Peirce 1931-1958) will be given in the customary two-part number. So, this 1867 quotation is from volume 1, paragraph 553.

exactly my point. The fever was already perfectly formed before the doctor interpreted it as a symptom; the diagnosis was subsequent and did not affect it ontologically. The passage between the fever–sign and my doctor’s diagnosis was discontinuous. Genuine semiosis, instead, swims in continua.

2.2.4 Application: a viable model for T–semiosis

In this section I will link object, sign and interpretant to their corresponding elements in T–semiosis. Peircean arguments are parsimonious because they make use of a very small number of notions and relations to grow into several levels of scale. So, depending on the scale we adopt, the sign–object–interpretant series can be made to correspond to different items of interest for translation scholars. Here, I choose the scale of a translation job after the translator has finished her work and the text begins to circulate in the target environment. Please have a look at this diagram.

Figure 2



I will illustrate the above figure using a simplified case for the sake of clarity (more at 6.3 below). A series of semiotic processes on the source side results in a text. This text turns into an original when it becomes part of a translation project—ie, when it enters T–semiosis. T–semiosis results in a target text which mediates between the original and the target environment. For this reason, the target text carries out the function of the Peircean sign. Finally, the translation will have semiotic effects on the target side; this is why its receivers’ interpretations and reactions correspond to the Peircean interpretant. Figure 2 shows that, even at this very elementary level, the elements of

Peirce's sign can be used to represent T-semiosis and say something more about it. In short, it says that target readers will be able to form a representation of the original for themselves thanks to the mediation of the target text.

2.3 *How signs work: Ground and goal*

Signs represent their object not from all respects, but under a certain viewpoint. Also, no sign is random; semiosis always has a definite sense of direction. In other words, semiosis is grounded and teleological. Ground and goal are key notions to understand the internal working of signs, and they need to be understood together. The ground involves the object–sign relation of denotation, the goal involves the sign–interpretant relation of signification. Short wrote a scintillating paragraph on these notions and their interdependence, I would like to quote from it at length.

A sign is one element of an indivisible triad: *object*, *sign*, and *interpretant*. Nothing is an object which is not signifiable; nothing is a sign that is not interpretable as signifying some object; and nothing is an interpretant that does not interpret something as signifying an object. An object need not be signified and a sign need not be interpreted; but they are what they are in virtue of potential signs and potential interpretants, respectively. These potentialities are more than mere possibilities. Something is a sign in virtue of a *ground*—or relation of sign to object—that would justify a particular interpretation of it. Significance, then, is grounded interpretability. But an interpretant can only be grounded or justified in relation to some goal of interpretation. Therefore, corresponding to each ground and to each sign there is an actual or possible goal or interpretation. [... S]emiosis is essentially teleological” (Short 1986: 105).

Looking at figure 1, one could see that the sign negotiated with the object on one side and with the interpretant on the other. This double negotiation can now be specified a bit better: the sign–object negotiation results in the choice of the viewpoint, respect, or ground the sign adopts to denote the object and turn it into its referent; the sign–interpretant negotiation is played along the path traced by the goal of interpretation. This account fleshes out the non–deterministic nature of the sign. The

inherent teleology of semiosis means that there is no interpretation without some sense of direction. As I tried to show with the roast–chestnuts example, the *telos* is neither accidental nor successive, but it is part of the very conception of the sign. As to the ground, the whole history of scientific discovery can be seen as a quest to find fresh viewpoints on things, representing these through new signs, and producing persuasive accounts and explanations. The Copernican revolution is perhaps the most popular example. The sun rises from the east. In the Ptolemaic system, I say that the sun moves; in the Copernican system, I speak of apparent movement caused by the rotation of the earth. The same event, which here counts as object, produced two distinct signs which in turn gave rise to quite different interpretants—ask Galileo. The signs are different because their grounds are. “Each thing is as many signs as there are grounds for distinct interpretation” (Ibid.).

2.3.1 Application: the viewpoint theory of equivalence

Translated texts always represent originals from a certain viewpoint and for a certain goal of interpretation and/or communication. Debates on equivalence should take this simple fact into consideration if they are to reflect the semiotic nature of translation. When we say that sign B in its semiotic system is equivalent to sign A in its different semiotic system, we should always bear in mind that equivalence is relative to a certain viewpoint and a certain interpretive goal. This is old hat for translation scholars since Skopos theory; however, the significance of this insight is that ground and goal are not liminal or accidental conditions to semiosis, let alone distorting elements of the process of sign production. There is no such thing as total representation and there is no such thing as random semiosis. This may also have a practical use: one should focus on ground and directionality when the degree and kind of similarity of a translated sign is hard to establish. The relativity of ground and goal, however, does not apply to the conception of equivalence itself. Saying that equivalence is relative to ground and goal of interpretation is not to say that we may dispose of the notion of equivalence altogether. Zero–equivalence—or better zero–degree

similarity—is a mere ideal, just as unattainable as total equivalence. In between these two unreal points, we can find the infinite gamut of similarities translators pursue, establish and follow.

2.4 *The categories*

The object–sign–interpretant series corresponds to Peirce’s categories, called firstness, secondness, and thirdness. The categories are three realms or modes of being, the cornerstones of Peirce’s metaphysics, and the basis of his ontology and epistemology. The following table may help us get an initial feel of the categories.

Firstness	Secondness	Thirdness
An immutable pain, a pure feeling	An unexpected bump, a reflex	A word, a synthetic thought
Singular	Dual	Plural (triadic)
Quality	Reaction	Mediation
Possibility	Existence	Law
Potentiality (negative generality)	Actuality	Generality
Chance	Action/Reaction	Continuity
Quality	Experience	Thought
Present	Past	Future

Logically the categories come in the firstness–secondness–thirdness sequence because of ‘prescission’ (the converse of ‘abstraction’, verbal form: ‘prescind’). “The category of first can be prescinded from second and third, and second can be prescinded from third. But second cannot be prescinded from first, nor third from second” (CP 1.353, 1880). In other words, the categories can be pictured as Chinese boxes. However, when they manifest themselves together, they form irreducible triads. You can open the lid of the largest (thirdness) box and look at the secondness box

inside. But you cannot remove it from there. Also, you can flip the lid of the secondness box to look at the firstness box, but again you cannot dislodge it. In genuine triads, the three categories are both distinct and inseparable. The categories are also the basis for a phenomenology. In this respect, secondness manifests itself before the other categories, because semiosis is revved up by the experience of an event. The pure qualities contained in the event allow us to perceive the phenomenon ('phaneron' in Peirce's terminology) and to tell it apart from the rest. Only later do we form perceptual judgements followed by the more developed thoughts the phaneron may excite. In other words, phenomenology gives us the categories in the sequence second, first, third.

As to the terms, in 1897 Peirce named his categories "Quality, reaction, and mediation" (CP 4.3, 1898) but "for scientific terms, Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, are to be preferred as being entirely new words without any false associations whatever" (Ibid.). Then he had this warning to give:

How the conceptions are named makes, however, little difference. I will endeavour to convey to you some idea of the conceptions themselves. It is to be remembered that they are excessively general ideas, so very uncommonly general that it is far from easy to get any but a vague apprehension of their meaning... (Ibid.).

Peirce believed that his categories were real and really effective, a belief that he illustrated with a story involving the law and a sheriff.

When we speak of an "idea," or "notion," or "conception of the mind," we are most usually thinking—or trying to think—of an idea abstracted from all efficiency. But a court without a sheriff, or the means of creating one, would not be a court at all; and did it ever occur to you, my reader, that an idea without efficiency is something equally absurd and unthinkable? Imagine such an idea if you can! Have you done so? Well, where did you get this idea? If it was communicated to you viva voce from another person, it must have had efficiency enough to get the particles of air vibrating. If you read it in a newspaper, it had set a monstrous printing press in motion. If you thought it out yourself, it had caused something to happen in your brain. And again, how do you know that you did have the idea when this discussion began a few lines above, unless it had efficiency to make some

record on the brain? The court cannot be imagined without a sheriff. Final causality cannot be imagined without efficient causality; but no whit the less on that account are their modes of action polar contraries. The sheriff would still have his fist, even if there were no court; but an efficient cause, detached from a final cause in the form of a law, would not even possess efficiency: it might exert itself, and something might follow *post hoc*, but not *propter hoc*; for *propter* implies potential regularity. Now without law there is no regularity; and without the influence of ideas there is no potentiality (CP 1.213, 1902).

Please notice Peirce's triadism in the last sentence: ideas are potential firsts, the sheriff is the efficient second, and the law is the regular third. The real efficiency of the categories does not mean that they can exist outside of some semiotic system. Peirce would agree that *il n'ya pas de hors-texte*; in fact, in 1905 he wrote that "all this universe is perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs" (CP 5.448n.1, 1905). So there is nothing outside of signs that exists, that is real, or that is true. This fact does not prevent us from holding a fairly strong conception of representation, reality and truth. In fact, the pervasiveness of signs overcomes the dualistic requirement that there be a clear-cut metaphysical division between the entities that can be used in representation and the entities that get represented. Eco proposed, quite pragmatically, that "the notion of interpretation requires that a portion of language can be used as interpretant of another portion of language. This is, after all, Peirce's concept of interpretation and unlimited semiosis" (Eco 1990: 35).³

Before moving on to the next section which describes the categories in more detail, I would like to clarify why I described them as ontological and epistemic. Some semioticians characterise semiotics as a logic, others as an ontology, others still as an epistemology. These descriptions are all accurate and not contradictory (cf. Deely 2001 and Deely 2002 for brief accounts of Peirce's truly 'post-modern' metaphysical position. A broader treatment in Deely 2003). What really counts is

³ I am quoting from the Italian edition, my translation.

that one should not cleave a wedge between conceptions and the means, vehicles or conduits that represent them. The semiotic container is so inherent a feature of the semiotic content that it does not make much sense to try and separate or oppose them. You break the form and the content will not spill on the floor; it would simply vanish into thin air. Also, it is important that semiotics is not regarded as mainly a theory of communication. My preferred view is that of semiosis as our species' ability to participate in the life and evolution of signs, which explains much of our biological success. Semiosis is about collectively solving problems to ensure our survival as individuals and as a species, not so much about communicating messages to each other.

2.4.1 Secondness and thirdness

A full account of firstness—the most intractable category—falls beyond our present confines, but a notorious news story can help us contrast and understand secondness and thirdness. I began writing these notes in Washington D.C. and in the institutional limbo that followed the American presidential elections of the year 2000. After the ballot was cast, the returns were so close that a president-elect could not be announced for weeks. The race was especially close in the state of Florida, where the ballots had to be recounted manually in several counties after the machines used for the initial count had tossed out too many ballots. Shortly after election day, the two main candidates appeared on TV with the following statements:

Mr. Bush.

That's why my campaign supported the automatic recount of all the votes in Florida. Everyone in Florida has had his or her vote counted once. Those votes have been recounted. In some counties, they have been counted a third and even fourth time.

And that brings us to the second principle, accuracy. This process must be accurate. As Americans have watched on television, they have seen for themselves that manual counting, with individuals making subjective decisions about voter intent, introduces

human error and politics into the vote-counting process. Each time these voting cards are handled, the potential for errors multiplies.

Mr. Gore.

This is a time to respect every voter and every vote. This is a time to honor the true will of the people. So our goal must be what is right for America.

There is a simple reason that Florida law and the law in many other states call for a careful check by real people of the machine results in elections like this one.

The reason? Machines can sometimes misread or fail to detect the way ballots are cast; and when there are serious doubts, checking the machine count with a careful hand count is accepted far and wide as the best way to know the true intentions of the voters.

(Washington Post, Nov. 16, 2000)

Neither man could deny that the goal of counting ballots was to ascertain the intention of the voters. Mr. Bush claimed we could not trust humans because they could not apply uniformly consistent standards and were prone to error; Mr. Gore, on the contrary, said the intention of too many voters had escaped the counting machines and only a manual recount could salvage it. Never mind that both were driven to this fine hermeneutic debate by base self-interest; let us look at the two versions of the story from a semiotic viewpoint.

Mr. Bush's version preferred secondness over thirdness. Counting machines do not really 'interpret' the intention of the voter; instead, certain formal features of the paper ballot cause them to change state, as is the case in all automatic processes, including computing. When this happens, the flow of semiosis is broken and becomes discontinuous. Automatic processes are governed by action-reaction relations: action: the holes punched in the ballot are not totally free from chads; reaction: the vote is discarded. This is precisely why many votes did not make it into the official returns initially. Looking at chads is precisely the job of human counters. Mr. Gore's version of the

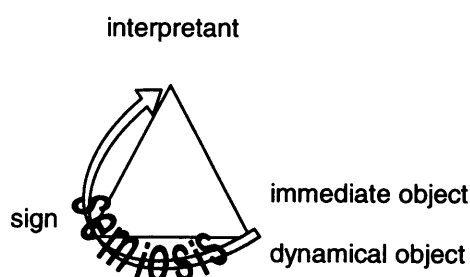
story is closer to thirdness than it is to secondness in so far as the human mind responds to a continuous relation between the voter's intention and the interpretation of it as a vote through the mediation of the ballot. Of course the recount will still be based upon certain standards—such as the now-famous dangling and pregnant chads—to guide interpretation, but in the end a representation will be formed of what was in the mind of the voter 'as reflected' by the ballot sheet. If the human counters' intentions are pure, the non-uniformity of judgement denounced by the Republican camp is nothing more than the leeway inherent in the interpretation of all genuine signs.

2.5 *The object*

So far we have seen the sign and its relation with the object, but we know precious little of the object itself. The object is whatever the sign refers to. There are two classes of object: dynamical and immediate. The former class includes 'things out there': existent individual things, such as the books, paper weight and bottle of water I can see on my desk right now.⁴ There is no way for me to have a direct and full knowledge of anything included in this class. I can look at the paper weight, but all I know about it is a product of some electro-chemical signals that my eyes send to the brain. When I turn to an object and focus on it, I make it stand out from the continuum of the world and identify it. This is the function of a pointing finger. When it is thus perceived and identified, the thing out there becomes something else, it becomes 'the object of my attention'. This second entity is what Peirce called 'immediate object'. Even in this highly simplified account, we can see that the immediate object is already in some sense a mental representation (cf. CP 5.473, 1907). We can now proceed to include the two objects in our semiotic triangle.

⁴ In the following, objects will be mostly material entities in the outer world because they make better examples. Immaterial things like Emma Bovary and portions of the inner world such as jealousy would do just as fine

Figure 3



I need to allay fears that the dynamical object is something akin to Kant's *Ding an sich*. This would undermine my claim to Peirce's metaphysical originality and would throw him immediately into the camp of those who believe that universals have a more real existence than things (nominalists) or those who believe that there is no reality apart from its presentation to consciousness (idealists). To do this, I cannot see a better strategy than to offer a long quotation from Peirce.

We must distinguish between the immediate object—i.e. the object as represented in the sign—and the Real (no, because perhaps the object is altogether fictive, I must choose a different term, therefore), say rather the dynamical object, which, from the nature of things, the sign cannot express, which it can only indicate and leave the interpreter to find out by collateral experience. For instance, I point my finger to what I mean, but I can't make my companion know what I mean, if he can't see it, or if seeing it, it does not, to his mind, separate itself from the surrounding objects in the field of vision. It is useless to attempt to discuss the genuineness and possession of a personality beneath the histrionic presentation of Theodore Roosevelt with a person who recently has come from Mars and never heard of Theodore before. [...] For instance, suppose I awake in the morning before my wife, and that afterwards she wakes up and inquires, "What sort of a day is it?" This is a sign, whose [immediate] object, as expressed, is the weather at that time, but whose dynamical object is the impression which I have presumably derived from peeping between the window—curtains. [...] I reply, let us suppose: "It is a stormy day." Here is another sign. Its immediate object is the notion of the present weather so far as this is common to her mind and mine—not the character of it, but the identity of it. The dynamical object is the identity of the actual or Real meteorological conditions at the moment (CP 8.314 of March 14, 1909).

The first part of this quotation looks quite close to Quine's famous 'gavagai' example illustrating the indeterminacy of translation and of meaning (cf. Quine 1959: 148 and ff. See also Quine 1960). Behind both stories one can find a pragmatic account of meaning, whether it be in terms of behaviour, experience, or practical consequences. However, it would take me far too long to note the differences and similarities between Quine's ontological relativity—to which his indeterminacy of translation ultimately points—and Peirce's ontological pragmatism—to which Peirce's theory of the object (intentionality) ultimately points. Let us analyse the second example, instead. Peirce's second wife was (almost surely) a French-speaking Roma called Juliette. Juliette's question 'What sort of day is it?' is a sign. Its immediate object is the weather at that time *as expressed* in the question—ie, internal to it. The dynamical object is an individual entity *actually located* in Charles mind: that is, the impression he formed when he peeped out of the window. It doesn't matter here that this dynamical object is not a tangible and physical entity but a mental state. What counts is that this mental state is an existent individual—as opposed to a general—whose conditions of existence are totally independent from and unrelated with Juliette's question. Charles' answer is straightforward. He replies 'It is a stormy day'. The immediate object is a notion now shared by his mind and his wife's; the dynamical object is the meteorological conditions. This time, the dynamical object can be a real and individual 'thing out there'.

2.5.1 Application: originals are larger than translations

In T-semiosis, the object—original is normally a complex text rather than a simple material object or an impression of the weather formed peeping out of the window. Peirce's scholars did not pay enough attention to the problem of the 'size' and complexity of signs. This is a potentially serious shortcoming which should be kept in check if interpretive semiosis is to serve as a viable model for translation theory. With this caveat in mind, splitting the original in two has interesting implications. The dynamical original—or the text *per se*—is ultimately unknowable. All that can feed T-semiosis is the immediate original. As a consequence, translation will always leave an

unprocessed residue behind and the original will always be larger than its translation. The series of translations of the Bible is the best example of this residue. Each project combines a long tradition of interpretation and a fresh ground and/or goal that justifies a new translation. If well chosen, the new translation–sign will reveal or construe aspects of the original that previous translations had missed or chosen to overlook. If there were no residue, there would be no room for new translation–signs to grow from the original, and a perfect translation would eventually appear—which is patently absurd. I hasten to add that this line of argument does not warrant traditional ‘lost in translation’ remarks. As I explained in 2.3.1 above, signs work *because of*, not *in spite of* the fact that they cannot represent their objects in their totality. However, the fact that a text can never be fully represented by a translation (or any other sign, for that matter) does not grant the opposite position that anything goes. Again, in the same section I claimed that zero–representation was just as unattainable as total representation. Here, I would like to make the corresponding point that translations are limited—‘determined’ in Peircean terms—by their originals. Let me remind you that the immediate original results from a grounded contact between the dynamical original and the translator. Although this contact has a purely physiological nature and escapes conscience altogether, it is still enough evidence that a text exists out there and we have to deal with it (cf. Proni 1990: 114). If this were not the case, a single text in semiotic system B could claim to be the translation of all possible texts in semiotic system A—which, again, is patently absurd. In 2.8.1 below I will explain why translations are also always larger than their originals.

2.6 *The theory of the interpretant*

Now we shall turn to the interpretant, which, with the sign and the object, completes the semiotic triangle. Always bearing in mind that we are describing parts of a continuum—ie, that semiosis proceeds in one fell swoop—at this point of our story we can assume that the sign has already received and selected enough material from the object and is ready to pass it along to the next man standing in line. At this juncture, we move from the sign–object relation, which resonates with the

notion of referent, to the sign–interpretant relation, which leads to signification and, eventually, meaning. Reference or denotation is a sign’s logical breadth; signification or meaning is a sign’s logical depth.

2.6.1 The sign ‘determines’ the interpretant

Peirce gave us several accounts of the relation between the sign and the interpretant at different stages of his life; so, whatever reconstruction one may attempt can be easily contradicted. In my view, the crucial factors in the theory of the interpretant are the three notions of determination, interpretive bet, and ultimateness. I will start with determination. In 1905, towards the end of his life, Peirce explained his notion of ‘determination’ in connection with his most famous classification of signs.

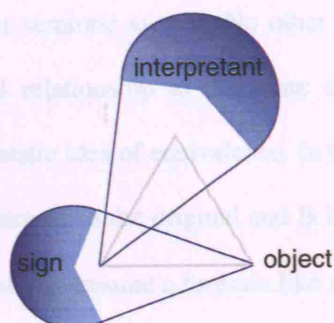
First, an analysis of the essence of a sign, (stretching that word to its widest limits, as **anything which, being determined by an object, determines an interpretation to determination, through it, by the same object**), leads to a proof that every sign is determined by its object, either first, by partaking in the characters of the object, when I call the sign an **Icon**; secondly, by being really and in its individual existence connected with the individual object, when I call the sign an **Index**; thirdly, by more or less approximate certainty that it will be interpreted as denoting the object, in consequence of a habit (which term I use as including a natural disposition), when I call the sign a **Symbol** (CP 4.531, 1906).

Please bear in mind that, in practice, most if not all signs show iconic, indexical and symbolic features. Therefore, the word ‘either’ in the third line of the quotation, should be taken *cum grano salis*. This quotation comes from one of Peirce’s many attempts at defining semiosis and pragmatism. I chose it especially for the passage “anything which, being determined by an object, determines an interpretation to determination, through it, by the same object”. This definition of ‘sign’ shows an unusual density of the term ‘determine’ and its derivatives. Peirce used the term in a somewhat special sense. A modern dictionary lists the following meanings among others:

[...] 6. To limit in scope or extent. 7. Mathematics. To fix or define the position, form, or configuration of. 8. Logic. To explain or limit by adding differences. 9. Law. To put an end to; terminate. [...] (*American Heritage Dictionary*, Third Edition)

Our ordinary usage of ‘determine’ is influenced by senses number 7 and 9. In contrast, Peirce used the term in senses number 6 and 8, in line with his passion for etymology (Latin ‘to limit’, *de + terminus*, ‘boundary’). Thus, the object traces boundaries for the sign which, in turn, limits a range for the interpretant.

Figure 4



This means that only a limited class of sign can be used to pull a certain object into semiosis, and only a limited class of interpretant can be the proper effect of a certain sign. At the same time, no object can be represented by just one sign and no sign can result in just one interpretant. This latter logical property of signs is empirically verifiable: think of the simple fact that any sign can be lifted from a text and quoted in another. Setting the sign in a new interpretive path will necessarily change its reference and signification—that is, its relations with the object and the interpretant, respectively.

2.6.2 Application: an idea of equivalence based on inference

In 2.3.1 above we have applied the notion of ground to translation equivalence and we have seen that total equivalence is just as unreal as zero-equivalence. Here I would like to explore Peirce's notion of ‘determination’. I believe that on this notion rests the very possibility of translation.

Imagine a world in which interpretants corresponded one to one to their respective sign–object complexes. In that world, translation would be impossible because the elements of the original could not enter interpretive paths other than the ones they were already in, let alone interpretive paths in different semiotic systems. Suppose translation was possible after all. If you gave a text to 100 translators, in that chilling world you would read 100 identical translations. In fact, translators mediate between different semiotic systems and represent a preferred interpretation of given signs using other signs to produce similar (equivalent) interpretants.

Translators are expected to produce signs that show equivalence relationships with a text, a text portion, or a set of texts in another semiotic system. No other text type apart from translation is expected to attain this intertextual relationship to the same extent. Many existing accounts of translation semiosis are based on a static idea of equivalence. In them, equivalence is represented by the formula $A=B$; where A is an element in the original and B is its ‘equivalent’ in the translation. The picture does not change much if you assume a formula like $A\approx B$, ‘A is almost equivalent to B’. If you think that A and B are already equivalent or similar, the task of the translator boils down to unveiling the meaning of A and hitting upon the correct B in the target system. It follows that there exists one B equivalent to A such that any other option is either inadmissible or second–best. A semiotic analysis based on inference tells a different story. Inference is represented by the formula $A\rightarrow B$, “if A then B”. After stabilising her interpretant for A, the translator guesses at her B. After a satisfactory series of tests she normally finds something she likes and adopts it as her solution. Therefore, a translator’s job is picking the best B and *pronouncing* it similar to A. B had never been similar to A before the translator *made* the two elements equivalent. However, inferences tend to stabilise, especially when successive occurrences of the same or similar signs lend themselves to the same or similar interpretations. In other words, $A\rightarrow B$ tends towards $A=B$ over time. This fact, though, does not detract from the primacy of inference over equivalence. An analogy found in Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein 1969: 152, cit. in Frongia 1983: 225) can illustrate the point. The position of stabilised equivalences in relation to inferential processes is analogous to that of a

geometrical axis around which a solid revolves. The axis is fixed not because of some intrinsic features, but rather because of the very movement of the solid around it; it is fixed only in relation to the spinning solid. Likewise, equivalences are only apparently central in the system, in fact they are historically constituted by inferential processes and can be altered or subverted any time by further inferences as soon as the need arises.

2.7 *Habits and beliefs*

Among the effects of signs, their intended meaning or proper significate effect has a prominent position in ordinary human communication. Interpretants are such “proper significate effects” (CP 5.473, 1907). But since the interpretant is itself a sign, it needs another sign to interpret it. Thus signs would follow one another in an endless fugue. This is in contrast with our common-sense experience of a world of stable interpretants. Clearly an ultimate interpretant is needed. Several authors have followed Peirce in this quest; the most lucid exposition I found is (Short 1996, see also 3.12 below). To put an end to the endless series, Peirce looked for something which would not be a sign and yet be general. Dissociating the ideas of signhood and generality “marked a revolution in [Peirce’s] theory of signs or semeiotic” (Short 1996: 488). This discovery opened the door to a new breed of signs and profoundly affected the whole architecture of Peirce’s thought.

Peirce found the ultimate interpretant to be the *habit*. Habits are dispositions towards action, they are acquired by experience, and are retained until some circumstance forces a change. Thus, semiosis is potentially unlimited, but it actually finds an endpoint in a general entity which is not a sign. Here is one of Peirce’s definitions of habit: “[Readiness] to act in a certain way under given circumstances and when actuated by a given motive is a habit; and a deliberate, or self-controlled, habit is precisely a belief” (CP 5.480, 1907). Please note that the disposition to act is not absolute, but a function of both certain circumstances and a motive or desired goal. Because an ultimate element has been found, the fugue of signs acquires the order, finality and direction we are familiar with in our everyday experience. The habit is the meaning of an intellectual sign and the ultimate

interpretant (cf. CP 5.494, 1907). However, this does not mean that semiosis cannot proceed any further when a habit is established. Habits and beliefs are constantly challenged by ‘surprising facts’ which contradict and undermine standing beliefs. In effect, there is a sense in which all thought can be seen as directed towards habit change. This implies that our work of interpretation and the knowledge it produces are inherently fallible.

[E]very proposition which we can be entitled to make about the real world must be an approximate one; we never can have the right to hold any truth to be exact. Approximation must be the fabric out of which our philosophy has to be built (CP 1.404, c.1890).

[F]allibilism is the doctrine that our knowledge is never absolute but always swims, as it were, in a continuum of uncertainty and of indeterminacy (CP 1.171, c. 1897).

2.7.1 Application: translators’ habits

Let me reprise the inference-based account of equivalence I gave in 2.6.2 above. Reading that section, one could have objected that I had failed to keep true to my assumption that semiosis is about processes and events. In fact, if I write ‘ $A \rightarrow B$ tends to become $A=B$ ’ I use object-like entities. In the light of Peirce’s theory of habit I can now complete my account. I will tell you the story of an American translator who, while working on an Italian poem, is staring at a word she has just typed and is unable to proceed. Other stories would work equally well, such as a word she is totally unfamiliar with, signs that are not words, and semiotic effects that depend on the whole text and not on individual words. But I will keep to this popular case for the sake of convenience. She got stuck at the word *accessorio*. She has written ‘accidental’ as usual, but this time she does not like it. She was not happy with ‘accidental’ after she saw how it interacted with the immediate context: she wanted ‘accidental’ to rhyme with ‘carnivorous’. This is why our translator is reconsidering one of her stable interpretants for *accessorio*. She is on the verge of habit-change.

This implies guessing at alternative interpretations for *accessorio* (now, for her, an object), betting on one of them, testing the words she begins to like (against, eg, length, sound, feel, meanings, etc.), and finally adopting one as her new or complementary habit for *accessorio*. All along the process (which may last a split second or several days), she is engaged in a problem-solving activity that relies on both internalised norms and unconstrained musing.

I want to add here something we learned from the theory of habit. What is our translator's new habit? Suppose the word she found after running the inference engine was 'adscititious'. Would you say 'adscititious' was her new habit? The answer is no. As we saw in the previous section, a habit cannot be a definite act or event, so the token 'adscititious' our translator wrote then and there in her text does not qualify. Can /adscititious/ as a type be her new habit? Again, the answer is no; habits are general entities but they are not signs. A habit is a *disposition* to act in a certain way. So, our translator's new habit is her tendency to think of 'adscititious' for *accessorio* when she meets it again and when similar conditions hold; for instance, a rhyme in -ous. Writing 'adscititious' in this poem was a mechanical act; the practical upshot of a strand of semiosis which has nothing to do with semiosis itself. Again, the object-like word is just an indication of the really interesting process (cf. Steconci 1994 for a fuller account).

2.8 *Semiosis and truth*

Signs have several effects, each of which corresponds to different classes of interpretant. Peirce explained his theory of the interpretant several times. I will choose the conversation I used in 2.5 above to illustrate the difference between dynamical and immediate object. Let me remind you of the setting: it is early in the morning (I presume), Juliette is still in bed and asks Charles what the weather is like. He says: "It is a stormy day". His reply produces a series of 'significate effects'. First we have the immediate interpretant, which is merely the impression that the sign has been recognised. Peirce describes it as "the vague Image or what there is in common to the different Images of a stormy day". The image forming in Juliette's mind is the firstness of the interpretant,

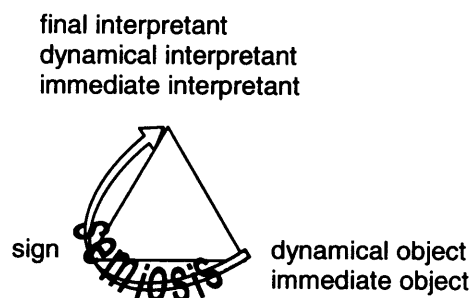
and as such it does not exist yet; it is the possibility upon which any actual conception will be built. When the image registers, the news will have some actual effect on the woman, perhaps she will be disappointed. This action–reaction movement is the dynamical interpretant which corresponds to secondness. To complete this micro–drama, Peirce describes the Final interpretant as “the sum of the Lessons of the reply, Moral, Scientific, etc.” With this, we leave again the actual world of secondness to enter the abstract realm of thirdness (all quotations from CP 8.314, 1909).

In CP 8.315 of 1909 Peirce says the dynamical interpretant is the only one that actually comes to light in someone’s mind. As to the relations between the three interpretants, we read that on one side the dynamical interpretant approaches the final interpretant, and on the other it approaches the immediate interpretant. Both movements are indefinite because the three interpretants swim in a continuum. This means that they flow into each other at infinitely smaller steps, yet they are absolutely distinct. The same passage also contains a remark about final interpretants and truth.

The Final interpretant does not consist in the way in which any mind does act but in the way in which every mind would act. That is, it consists in a truth which might be expressed in a conditional proposition of this type: “If so and so were to happen to any mind this sign would determine that mind to such and such conduct” (Ibid.).

We have already seen the ‘determination of conduct’ in our discussion of the habit (see 2.7 above). That discussion was about ultimateness. This is different; here we are dealing with truth. If a true interpretant actually appeared in the world, it would be a full representation of the dynamical object as it was in itself. It would have no definite ground (because all respects would be covered) and no sign could interpret it further (because it would already be a perfect representation of the object), so it would have no further goal either. Such sign is unimaginable because it would short–circuit semiosis. This is why the final interpretant is always deferred in a conditional future, always a *would–be*. The final interpretant is “the best interpretant of the sign relative to the goal of interpretation” (Short 1986: 106). With this discussion, we can add the remaining elements to picture of the sign.

Figure 5



2.8.1 Application: translations are larger than originals

According to the theory of the interpretant briefly sketched above, when semiosis is successful it produces a stable habit which in turn allows us to generate interpreting signs. Several aspects of Peirce's theory point at the conclusion that the interpreting sign is irreducibly in excess of the sign it interprets. Among these, we have already indicated the leeway of interpretation (2.7.1 above) and the role of inference, in which the interpreter has to add his imagination to the data at hand. More conclusively, Peirce wrote that "a sign is something by knowing which we know something more" (CP 8.332, 1904). All of this goes to show that no sign will ever allow us to predict exactly what its interpretation will be, which is consistent with the irreducible character of triads we saw in section 2.2.3. This is important for the translation scholar and even more so for the practitioner. It should be obvious by now that what we include in our translations are in effect our own interpretants of the originals, both established and fresh ones. If this is the case, and if the interpretant is always in excess of the sign it interprets, it follows that a translation is always larger than its original.

In 2.5.1 above we saw that the original was larger than its translation. Don't we have a contradiction here? Not at all. It has been remarked that original and translation stand in a dialectic relationship in which neither side can ever totally represent or reduce the other to its terms (cf. Ponzio 1993). As partial confirmation of this state of affairs, think of the non-reversible nature of translating. If B translates A, in principle A does not translate B (except for marginal cases like technical glossaries and the like). This could already be accounted for by the fact that translation

semiosis—not the sign—is the originary notion: the work I do to go from A to B has little in common with the work I do to go from B back to the semiotic system of A. We can now add one more reason to the non-reversibility of translation semiosis. The move from A to B left something behind due to the resistance of the dynamical original and gained fresh material due to the inherent excess of the interpreting translation. Back-translation would only amplify the areas of non overlap, especially if no information were transmitted between the two legs of T-semiosis.

Does this mean that something is lost and something is gained in all translating? In a sense it does, but the verbal expression is severely misleading. A loss is something you had but no longer have ('I lost my umbrella in the taxi') or something you could have had, but you don't ('I forgot to apply for the tax rebate, I lost €300'). In contrast, what the dynamical original refuses to reveal is something that you never had and could never get, under any historical circumstances. It has to do with the obstinate resistance of matter and with the associated difference between the dynamical and the immediate objects. I know the dynamical object is there, but all I know about it is the grounded immediate object. The sign is an agnostic and optimistic mediator. It is agnostic because it doesn't care to find out what the object *in itself* is like. It is optimistic, because it does know the object is real. In fact, only real objects can interact with the sign to produce true representations (see 2.12 below for a discussion). The same applies to the gain; that is, to the excess implied in the phrase 'the translation is larger than the original'. Excess implies something you have too much of, something you'd like to reduce to nothing. Again, the expression is misleading. You cannot minimise the gain to zero under any circumstances, because translations always say something more about their originals.

2.9 *The theory of investigation*

We have seen in 2.6.1 above that interpretants can be found within a field determined by the Sign. If this is true, how do we find the correct Interpretant that will eventually represent the Sign among the many possible ones? The answer depends on whether interpretation is novel or established. In

the latter case, we can use existing interpretants and move fast ahead; in the former, there is no essential difference with respect to solving an intellectual problem. Peirce worked at his theory of investigation at different stages of his life. The early formulation is part of his famous article “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities” of 1868, when he was twenty–nine; the mature stage is from 1877 with decisive changes made after 1901.

2.9.1 Induction and deduction

We all know how to tell a deduction from an induction: the former is the analytic inference that draws a result from a known rule applied to a case; the latter is the synthetic inference that draws a rule from a case and a result. Using a formal representation of syllogisms, we can visualise the two premisses and the conclusion in each inference (alternative labels for the parts of the syllogisms—ie, antecedent, consequent and implication—are from Bonfantini 1987: 47).

Deduction

Rule or Implication

Case or Antecedent

∴ Result or Consequent

This is the mode of reasoning of disciplines that can be based on axioms, like mathematics (“All the demonstrations of Euclid are of this kind” CP 2.96, 1902), but very few rules can be reliably formulated beforehand in T–semiosis. Therefore this type of inference has limited application.

A representation of induction in the form of a syllogism looks like this:

Induction

Case or Antecedent

Result or Consequent

∴ Rule or Implication

Here the logic is based on the collection of the largest possible number of cases and the selection of relevant qualities to be observed in them. Let me give you Peirce's example:

Case.--These beans are from this bag.

Result.--These beans are white.

∴ Rule.--All the beans from this bag are white (CP 2.623, 1877).

2.9.2 Problems with the induction–deduction opposition in T–semiosis

Peirce's syllogism works because the inquirer has already decided which quality he intends to include in the premisses (colour is not the only one that can be predicated of beans) and can confidently assume that the beans he can see are a representative sample of those hidden in the bag. In contrast, because of the high variability and complexity of translation events, the exclusive application of this type of inference is bound to be highly problematic. Let us substitute translations to beans.

Case—These signs in language B are translated from language A.

Result—These translated signs show features x, y and z.

∴ Rule—All translations from A to B show features x, y and z.

This is no longer a realistic research plan, yet manuals are still on sale that are patterned after the above formula. Several things can go wrong here.

1. Because translations are variable, how does one know a list of translation cases is a representative sample of the whole class?
2. Beans can be white, brown, red or black with a negligible residue of borderline colours; but translation features are continuous; how does one slice them up into discrete characters?
3. Scores of qualities can be predicated of any target text (translations are complex): how is one to know that x, y and z are the relevant ones?

4. Because the interpretation of texts is open-ended, how does one define the class to which the conclusion applies?

The sampling problems (1 and 4) can be overcome by restricting the field. For instance, I can delimit the class by language pair, time period, type of publication and topic. This is like shrinking the bean bag to the size of a handkerchief, and the price to pay is a rule that applies to a handful of beans. Discreteness and relevance (2 and 3) are often at odds. All these issues call for crucial decisions the researcher will have to take based on her own ideas of what good qualities and classes are like, and there goes the supposed objectivity of inductive methods. Finally, something will always be out of reach of induction. Even supposing that the above problems can be overcome, the conclusion of an induction is nothing more than the probabilistic extension of empirical observations to the whole class to which the cases belong. Although this can be later presented as a law, it is not a causal explanation.

2.9.3 Abduction

In both kinds of inference, the order in which the premisses appear does not affect the conclusion; it doesn't make a difference if I consider the case before the rule in a deduction or vice versa. What really matters is what I arrive at in the conclusion. Therefore—by virtue of simple combination—there must be a third possibility of which the following narrative is an example.

Suppose I enter a room and there find a number of bags, containing different kinds of beans. On the table there is a handful of white beans; and, after some searching, I find one of the bags contains white beans only. I at once infer as a probability, or as a fair guess, that this handful was taken out of that bag. This sort of inference is called making an hypothesis. It is the inference of a case from a rule and a result (2.623, 1877).

In syllogistic format:

Hypothesis

Result or Consequent

Rule or Implication

∴ Case or Antecedent

At first blush, hypothesis may seem a qualitative form of induction. This is not so, here is how Peirce described the difference between the two types of inference:

Induction is where we generalize from a number of cases of which something is true, and infer that the same thing is true of a whole class. Or, where we find a certain thing to be true of a certain proportion of cases and infer that it is true of the same proportion of the whole class. Hypothesis is where we find some very curious circumstance, which would be explained by the supposition that it was a case of a certain general rule, and thereupon adopt that supposition. Or, where we find that in certain respects two objects have a strong resemblance, and infer that they resemble one another strongly in other respects (2.624, 1877).

2.9.4 The mature model: abduction—deduction—induction

Peirce was not totally aware of the essential difference of these two forms of synthetic inference in 1877 when he wrote the above passages; the full extent of his insight became clear to him over twenty years later—in *Minute Logic*, a book he never finished—when he associated the types of inference to his three categories. More precisely, he established in which way the premisses can be a sign of their respective conclusions. Deduction was linked to the index or second, abduction (or “adopting a hypothesis” (CP 2.96, 1902) to the icon or first, and induction to the symbol or third (or the premisses of a deduction are an index of their conclusion, etc.). Interesting consequences can be drawn from these associations: while deduction leads to a mere quantitative growth in knowledge and induction to a qualitative growth; abduction is “the only kind of argument which starts a new idea” (Ibid.). But everything comes at a price: in abduction the conclusion is merely possible, whereas in induction it is probable and in deduction certain. So, we have a trade-off between an

inference's degree of certainty and its ability to enrich our knowledge. Peirce quickly recognised that the solution would come by arranging the three kinds of inference not as alternative or parallel paths, but as successive steps of investigation, in this order (from Bonfantini 1987: 51):

Abduction	Surprising fact (Consequent)
	Connection of Implication
	Law of explanation (Antecedent)
Deduction	Law of explanation (Implication)
	Accomplished fact (Antecedent)
	Predicted fact (Consequent)
Induction	Prediction of fact (Antecedent)
	Verification of fact (Consequent)
	Connection of confirmation (Implication)

By this stage, Peirce had abandoned syllogism and the search for characters or qualities. The new method, which provides a viable alternative to the Scylla and Charybdis of the deduction–induction opposition, can be presented as a narrative (cf. CP 6.522–547, 1901 and 7.189–207, 1901). Investigation is spurred by a ‘surprising fact’, when “a phenomenon presents itself which, without some special explanation, there would be reason to expect would *not* present itself” (CP 7.194, 1901). In the face of a surprising fact, we need a fresh explanation. We then try abduction, in which we look for such explanation; a proposition that could potentially account for the fact. We find one and adopt it as a hypothesis. There are no sound guidelines that optimise this search; technically, it is guess–work. This is why explanatory hypotheses will always be mere possibilities or, better still,

questions that the other types of inference will have to answer. Testing begins in the next step of deduction, in which we draw the consequences that may ensue from the explanation and turn them into predictions of future tests. Please notice that investigation has been purely speculative so far; even the prediction that concludes the deduction stage is an ideal state of affairs. In the next stage of induction we test the hypothesis *in vivo* and compare the results obtained with the predictions inherited from the previous stage. Even when the result agrees with the prediction, the conclusion is inherently fallible; its upshot is merely to extend and strengthen our confidence in the original hypothesis. As a consequence, the only inference that can generate new information or knowledge is abduction. If all goes well a long enough series of self-correcting inductive tests make us confident enough of an explanation and we can accept our hypothesis as a new interpretive habit of the (no longer surprising) fact. This will temporarily bring the investigation to an end until the next surprising fact forces us to start all over again.

2.10 Elements of classification

The existential categories of which I have given a brief sketch in 2.4 led Peirce to a classificatory fury that spared no corner of his philosophical architecture. Many of these classifications are of no relevance for the translation scholar, but this map of semiotics cannot ignore them altogether. Proni (Proni 1990: 238 ff.) informs us that Peirce attempted a rudimentary classification of signs as early as 1867, his first organised attempt was 1903 and from that year on he never stopped to refine and revise it. Other, radically different classifications are from 1907 and 1908. The classifications differ in several points and generate a number of classes that ranges from 10 to 30 (with a potential combinatorial outcome of 59,049—cf. Proni 1990, esp. 229–286). I will limit myself to the first part of the 1903 classification because it helps us understand certain aspects of translation, especially of syncretic (multimedia) texts. All of Peirce's classifications rest on just one principle and a regulative constraint. The three existential categories provide the principle of organisation and the

constraint is that a higher–rank category can contain a lower–rank category but not the other way round—much like Chinese boxes. Peirce described his divisions as follows:

Signs are divisible by three trichotomies; first, according as the sign in itself is a mere quality, is an actual existent, or is a general law; secondly, according as the relation of the sign to its object consists in the sign’s having some character in itself, or in some existential relation to that object, or in its relation to an interpretant; thirdly, according as its Interpretant represents it as a sign of possibility or as a sign of fact or a sign of reason (2.243, 1903).

Here is a table of the nine resulting divisions:

	<i>First</i>	<i>Second</i>	<i>Third</i>
<i>Sign in itself</i>	Qualisign	Sinsign	Legisign
<i>Sign–Object</i>	Icon	Index	Symbol
<i>Sign–Interpretant</i>	Rheme	Theme/Dicisign	Argument

Before giving examples of these nine classes of sign, let me specify that they are jointly present in most existent signs in some degree and in varying proportions. Icons, for instance, are not given in the world, but there are certain signs like diagrams that are—so to speak, icon–rich. Also, because of the Chinese–boxes principle above, triadic signs always contain dyadic and monadic layers, dyadic signs always contain a monadic layer, and monadic sign is a misnomer, because firstness is just a layer in higher–rank signs. The categories are not mutually exclusive like a structuralist’s opposition between—say—phonemes /p/ and /b/. They are more like skins of an onion, layered one on top of the other.

The classification of signs is an application of the theory that the three categories and their complex relations are always present in any sign. Therefore, each sign shows the features of the dominant class, but it contains many classes—sometimes all—in several layers.

Signs are more similar to an onion, which you can peel indefinitely, than to fixed and definite entities. This is consistent with the theory of interpretation; indeed, it can be seen as its synchronic analogue (Proni 1990: 239, my translation).

Let me give you an example of the onion's skins limited to the icon-index-symbol series. A metaphor is obviously a symbol because it is expressed by means of ordinary, conventional words in the language. But it is also an index in so far as the tokens you find printed on the page are individual events that are factually linked to you the moment you read them. Finally, all metaphors also contain a strong iconic component; this is the pure and vague likeness that associates, for instance, words and weapons in expressions such as "she used some sharp words" and "that was pretty cutting language".⁵

2.10.1 Sign *per se*

Qualisign. This is not really a sign, because it needs a particular to manifest itself in the world of existence. However, it is described as "a quality that is a sign" (2.244, 1903) and the 'body' or carrier that brings it into existence has nothing to do with it. Let me explain this in detail. All things that work as signs can do so because of some vague quality that allows us to i) identify them as signs and ii) see the similarity between them and whatever they stand for. These qualities are the monadic elements implied in all signs. You cannot see them as they are, but only as they acquire substance; that is, when they become part of tangible signs. For instance, wind direction is the quality implied in the vane, but you can see it only because the vane embodied it. The wind blew from definite directions ages before the first weathervane was built or before the first human being was born, but it was not a sign of anything. It held out the *possibility* that a sign may be built one day which would imply this quality. Thus, qualities are also signs, but they are vague and potential. All other signs need them because they allow us to see that a sign is similar to something else *in*

⁵ Examples from <http://cogsci.berkeley.edu/>.

some respect. My favourite example is fish. In many cultures, fish are symbols of fertility. When fish begin to sing like nightingales they will stand a chance of being associated to music and harmony. But as long as they spawn offspring by the thousand, they will symbolise fertility. This means that not all signs are as arbitrary as Saussure would predict.

Sinsign. A fact or occurrence that is a sign because of its *haecceitas*. Peirce insists that the prefix *sin-* stands for “being only once” (Ibid.). Although not limited to this dimension, all signs can do their job because they are there when we need them. For instance a genuine triadic sign like an ordinary word in the dictionary is more of a sinsign when written in a document or uttered in conversation. The mark on the paper is in fact a token of the abstract type. The arms of a clock are a purer form of sinsign, because they stand for their object largely thanks of their contingency.

Legisign. An abstract law that prescribes what certain entities should be like if they are to be regarded as its tokens. Legisigns are conventions, general concepts, close to the elements of the Saussurian *langue*. Legisigns exist in order to be replicated in their tokens and interpreted. Other signs would exist even though they were not interpreted as signifying such and such; legisigns in contrast would not exist if they were not used in semiosis (cf. Short 1986: 110).

2.10.2 Sign–Object

Icon. As in the qualisign above, icons are possibilities, this time of relations of representation. According to Peirce, an icon would still be itself even though there were no object it stood for. This is seemingly absurd, in fact an object is required for there to be a relation. However, the existence of the object does not affect its representative quality. So, the quasi–object of an icon is the very quality the icon exemplifies (Ibid.). Since an icon is pure likeness, it cannot be explained in cognitive terms because it constitutes the possibility of signification. Only because of likenesses can we say that ‘*aliquid stat pro aliquo*.’ In this respect, icons help explain thought, but thought cannot be used to explain icons (cf. Proni and Stecconi 1999).

Index. When an object really affects another, by causality or contiguity, we can say that the one stands for the other as an index. A hole on a street sign is an index of the bullet that bored it. All signs that we actually exchange in communication have a large indexical component; eg, they are all tokens and as such to some extent indexes of their types. The word ‘quindi’ *as it appears here* is the index of an abstract Italian form. An index always has an iconic part, there must be in fact a quality that channels the contact with the object; but its representative quality does not depend on it.

Symbol. A rule or a law is the link between a symbol and its object; such rule compels the interpreter to understand a certain symbol to stand for a certain object. Symbols are general and can manifest themselves and have an effect in the world of experience only thanks to tokens. Unlike with icons and indexes, whose connection with the object was independent of semiotic processes, a symbolic relation is fully semiotic because “the rule which makes something a symbol is itself the ground of that symbol’s significance” (Short 1986: 110). All conventional signs, such as the elements of a natural language, are symbols.

2.10.3 Indexical signs and weathervanes

In 2.2.1 above I promised I would explain why weathervanes are regarded as signs. Indeed, to Peircean scholars the weathervane is the prototypical index. We have just seen that indexes are part of Peirce’s best known classification of signs. Here is a famous quotation.

A regular progression of one, two, three may be remarked in the three orders of signs, Icon, Index, Symbol. The Icon has no dynamical connection with the object it represents; it simply happens that its qualities resemble those of that object, and excite analogous sensations in the mind for which it is a likeness. But it really stands unconnected with them. The index is physically connected with its object; they make an organic pair, but the interpreting mind has nothing to do with this connection, except remarking it, after it is established. The symbol is connected with its object by virtue of the idea of the symbol-using mind, without which no such connection would exist (CP 2.299, c. 1895).

When you look at a weathervane you receive information from an index. Let us prescind from what the mind does with this information. The index is fully functional before you look at it. The relation between the revolving contraption on the roof and the (direction of) the wind is independent of you. In contrast, only a mind (or a quasi-mind) can establish the convention that links the sign to its object. Symbols **alone** are conventional. The weathervane is thus an example of a kind of semiosis that does not need an interpreting mind **to function**. In Peirce's words:

Thus a weathercock "tells" from which direction the wind blows by virtue of a real relation which it would still have to the wind, even if it were never intended or understood to indicate the wind (CP 2.357, 1901-2).

2.10.4 Sign-Interpretant

I present this third trichotomy—realised in virtue of the Sign-Interpretant relation—for the sake of completeness, for I will not use it in the rest of this study. This final classification divides Signs into Rhemes, Dicisigns, and Arguments, which Peirce made to correspond to Term, Proposition, and Argument in their ordinary sense (CP 8.337, 1904). Another quotation describes this trichotomy as distinct ways in which the Interpretant can look at the Sign:

[W]e may say that a **Rheme** is a sign which is understood to represent its object in its characters merely; that a **Dicisign** is a sign which is understood to represent its object in respect to actual existence; and that an **Argument** is a Sign which is understood to represent its Object in its character as Sign (CP 2.252, 1903).

2.11 Summary

I have sketched an account of Peirce's theory of signs and indicated some applications to translation theory. Here I would like to summarise my preliminary findings.

1. The interpretive bets from which my semiotic theory of translation moves are i) translation is a special kind of semiosis (t-semiosi) and ii) it is possible to identify its specific conditions.
2. T-semiosis is more originary than the object-like entities which it involves; including signs and texts in both the source and the target environments.
3. T-semiosis is an essentially triadic event. The general model of semiosis can be adapted and developed to describe translating and account for it.
4. The viewpoint (ground) from which a translator looks at the original and the telos (goal) of translating are not accidental but inherent features without which translation semiosis could not occur.
5. Translating is a problem-solving exercise based on inferential reasoning. Inference work makes target elements correspond to source elements. These pairings tend to become similarity relations in time.
6. A translator's habits include the disposition to associate certain target signs to other source signs when comparable conditions hold. In general, these are dispositions to adopt given solutions to given translations problems when certain conditions obtain.
7. The original is larger than the translation and the translation is larger than the original. Far from being a paradox, this shows a dialectical relationship between source and target that helps explain translation's non-reversibility.

2.12 Appendix: truth, reality and the community

I append these paragraphs here because they overshoot my stated aim of giving just enough information about Peirce's theory of signs as is required by an honest translation scholar. The quotation from CP 8.315 in 2.8 above ended with a conditional clause: the sign *would* determine someone's conduct. This means that the final interpretant lives in the conditional future: a

permanent would-be whose attainment always lies just ahead. Because the final interpretant is about truth, we can get closer and closer to true signs like a conic curve approaching its asymptote. The tantalising march of semiosis towards truth leaves one big question open. What is the status of truth? Is it real or is it a construct whose reality depends on what we make of it? This is a very big questions indeed, and I will limit myself to a few remarks.

Let us move from a seeming paradox. Peirce was convinced of the reality of the world. He defined the real as “that whose characters are independent of what anybody may think them to be” (CP 5.405, c.1893). You don’t start to float in the air just because you believe you can fly (but you can fly in your dreams); if your lover says “I am quitting you”, you cannot change her words (but you can make her change her mind); if you write about a talking tree, your tale is real (but the tree is not). On this score you would call Peirce a realist. On the other hand, he also believed we cannot have direct apperception of anything, whether they be entities in the inner psychical world or in the outer physical world (cf. his famous “Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed For Man” of 1868 at CP 5.231–263). All that is present to our conscience is present thanks to the mediation of other representations. As a consequence, all that *exists for us* is of the nature of signs. So, you would call Peirce an idealist.

These positions correspond—and I simplify a lot—to established dichotomies in Western thought: the ontological debate, probably as old as Socrates, between realism and nominalism (“do universals or things have a more real existence?”); and the modern cognitive debate between realism and idealism (“is there a reality apart from its presentation to consciousness?”). Peirce’s metaphysics was radically indifferent to these traditional currents of western philosophy. He wrote:

I have thus developed [...] the synechistic philosophy, as applied to mind. I think that [...] it carries along with it the following doctrines: first, a logical realism of the most pronounced type; second, objective idealism; third, tychism, with its consequent thorough-going evolutionism [...] (CP 6.163, 1892).

Again, these words may look paradoxical, but they are not. A difficult exercise is required to grasp their real import: overcoming the dyadic logic that underpins the twin oppositions: realism v nominalism and realism v idealism. Peirce's originality rests on turning to account his notions of community and continuity. In so doing, he could see that truth and reality are connected rather than opposed and that their foundation is neither objective nor subjective, but supra-subjective. Let us see how this works in detail, beginning with a quotation that will tell us what Peirce meant by the terms 'truth' and 'reality'.

The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real. That is the way I would explain reality (CP 5.407, 1878).

In the above quotation, truth stands to reality like sign to object. Let me remind you that in the Peircean sign, it is the object that determines the sign. Therefore, it is not the task of truth to show what is real; it is the goal of reality to produce true signs. At the lowest level of perception, the pen I am holding in my hand is real only insofar as it produces a true perceptual judgement in me; entities that fail to produce true perceptual judgements are not real.

The next question is: what guarantee can I have that the chain of representations that connect the self to the world (inner or outer) preserves the truth? The first immediate answer is discouraging because representations must be interpreted and, as we saw in 2.7 above, interpretive inference is inherently fallible. To solve this problem, Peirce turned to his notion of community. Let us see a passage that specifies the relation between reality and community:

The real, then, is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you. Thus, the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of an indefinite increase of knowledge (CP 5.311, 1868. Amended following Peirce, 1982-1999, vol. 2:239 and 608).

Seen under a certain light, Peirce's metaphysics resembles his theory of probability. Semiosis and reality converge like the frequency of an event in an ongoing survey and the calculated probability of the same event (Parker 1998). But one thing is to toss the coin very many times to see that heads and tails are equal in number in the long run, another is to infer that heads and tails are events of equal probability. The former is a collection of events, a series of existent individuals or seconds; the latter is a concept, a general third. No matter how long the series, it will never cross the categorial line. This is why a true sign, one whose object is a real entity, will always be one step ahead of our empirical investigations. This eventual sign will coincide with the opinion shared by a community of interpreters that is not only indefinitely large but that never knows enough to stop learning. A consequence of this state of affairs is that logic and the community principle imply each other. The argument put forward by an individual is *valid* only insofar as it is submitted to the scrutiny of the community of inquirers and finds a lasting consensus, and it will be *true* only if it finds the consensus of an infinite community of inquirers. Thus, semiosis is driven by the certainty of the existence of a real object of inquiry and by the indefinite hope that the community will eventually attain perfect knowledge of it.

Let us go back to the infinitely large community. One crucial feature is that when a collection or a series is infinite, its members are no longer individuals but become parts of a continuum. A continuum is unlike a set in one important sense: it no longer comprises individual members (seconds) but vague possibilities (firsts), while the set itself ceases to be identifiable as an actual object and becomes a general entity or third. Think of the infinite set as a line and of its non-individual members as points. A line is not actually made of points but of point-places. If you want to 'make' individual points at these places you need to disturb its continuity—eg, by intersecting the line with another line or by branching the line off in two as in the shape of the letter 'Y'. Also, the places are infinitely small, so in theory you can make an infinite number of points between any two points (more at 6.7 below).

I realise that these are decidedly esoteric ideas; I will try to pull out an example that helps visualise them. Imagine a very long train, perhaps 100 cars long; you can count the cars from the first to the last. Now imagine a much longer train; you may begin to count the cars one after another but their total number is indefinitely high and you will never manage to reach the last one. Finally, imagine an infinitely long train. According to Peirce's view of infinite series, there would no longer be individual cars. In fact, there would be *possible* cars, and they would become actual and individual cars only thanks to the external intervention of someone or something standing along the railway. These possible cars of an infinitely long train are no longer existent but are nevertheless real. In general, in Peirce's metaphysics the notion of reality is detached from the notion of existence. Events like reading the word 'rabbit' here and now are real and existent; entities like the lexeme /rabbit/ in the English language are not existent but are nevertheless real. Consequently, "all reality [is] something which is constituted by an event indefinitely future" (CP 5.311, 1868); a would-be (on continuity, cf. Potter and Shields 1977, Putnam 1995, Myrvold 1995, and Lane 1997).

2.12.1 Application: what are translation norms?

Translation is said to be regulated by norms. Norm theory has become a sub-field in the discipline as testified by publications such as (Schäffner 1999). However, there is a measure of uncertainty as to what kind of entities translation norms are. I would like to use the discussion above to clarify this point. Nobody can possibly disagree that translation norms are conventions. According to Lewis (Lewis 1969), a convention regarding 'p' can be described cognitively as follows: I know that p, I know that everyone else knows that p, I know that everyone else knows that I know that p, and so on. One example of convention is 'driving on the right', which illustrates that, for the late American philosopher, a convention is regular behaviour that solves the problem of co-ordinating collective action. This is in accordance with semiotic conventions—such as the feminine gender of the word *luna* in Italian and Spanish—in one important respect: conventions are essentially supra-subjective;

they live in a realm that is over and above its individual users. At the level of individuals, we merely need to realise what conventions exist and act accordingly. When I was brought into the world, *luna* was already feminine. I can follow, bend, or flout this grammar rule; but it's *that* convention I need to come to terms with and not any other.

If translation norms, as conventions, are supra-subjective, in what form do they manifest themselves to the individual translator? What else do I need to know about them to understand their significance for T-semiosis? To answer these questions, I would like to extend to norms in general the arguments I put forward in 2.7 above. I would like to see whether and in which respects they are Peircean habits. Regarding translation norms as habits accords with their conventional nature. Both conventions and habits result in regular behaviour: the former because they co-ordinate collective behaviour, the latter because they are dispositions to act. However, there is a difference too. Habits merely *result* in regular behaviour; observed behaviour has absolutely nothing to do with the norm itself. It is simply the upshot of norms in the world of experience. This means that translation norms—if they are indeed habits—belong with a mode of reality that is categorially distinct from that of actual facts, events, and actions. Norms are general and belong with thirdness, whereas events are particular and belong with secondness. Peirce's categories we have seen in 2.4 above can be presented as three worlds: i) a lower world of potentiality and pure chance; ii) the middle world of actuality and action–reaction processes, and finally iii) the upper world of habit and continuity. I will focus on the upper world where habits and norms dwell and I will bring it to bear on Lewis' chain of assumptions which logically characterises conventions. This chain can be seen a series of events. Event 1: I know that p; event 2: I know that you know that p; event 3: I know that you know that I know that p ...; event n:.... Here my argument will take a surprising turn and depart from Lewis' objectivism. This series is logically infinite. As we have just seen, infinite series are not made of individual and existent events but of possible events, just like the cars in an infinitely long train. When you stretch the convention series to infinity, the 'I know that p' events vanish and the series becomes continuous. All you are left with are i) vague parts that may become events

precisely because they are vague; ii) the actual events they result in; and iii) a general tendency. This tendency accounts for the fact that its vague parts (*may-be's* was another term Peirce used) cannot become just any event you like. They would tend to become events regarding *p* and someone's belief that *p*. In fact, the continuous series is itself a tendency, and this is precisely the *general* belief that *p*. When *p* is about T-semiosis, the general belief associated to it is a translation norm. I believe this confirms my original hypothesis: the ontological and epistemic nature of translation norms can be described as Peircean habits. At the same time, norms simply would not *be* without actual events that implement them in the second world of existence. Together with the potentialities in the first world, norms and their actual implementations play a team sport. We can severally talk about them for the sake of clarity; but the ontological basis of T-semiosis is precisely the irreducible three-way relation that holds between 'simple qualities', events, and translation norms.

Let us see a practical illustration. When I receive a thousand-word text in English for translation, I normally send back another text in Italian that is about a thousand words long (in fact, consistently little longer than that). In doing this, I implement a translation norm we can call the 'norm of quantity'. Let me insist one more time that my action is not the norm, I simply respond to and comply with it. And this does not change if you consider large numbers of translators following the norm. Think of very large operations, such as the European Commission translation service or the Translation Bureau of Canada's Department of Public Works and Government Services with around 1,000 in-house translators each. Let us assume that all these translators have unfailingly followed the norm of quantity for decades. Their cumulative behaviour, this long history of events would not be the norm either. The norm of quantity is like the lexeme /rabbit/ that—*qua* lexeme—nobody ever uttered, but is involved in every utterance of 'rabbit'. Because it is a habit, the norm of quantity is a tendency to act; but it is the tendency, not the act. However, without the norm I would not know what to do with my thousand-word source text. Without the norm, nobody would know what to expect of me either. Let me repeat that, on this point, my semiotic account agrees with

Lewis', because habits are shared by groups of people and one of their effects is helping people co-ordinate behaviour and solve collective problems.

3 Review of the Literature

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is a detailed review and criticism of the authors that have explored the nexus between translation theory and Peirce's semiotics. They include two broad groups: i) semioticians who have found in translation theory a practical ground on which to put their abstract notions to the test and ii) translation scholars who have found in Peirce original views on meaning, communication, etc. that may help them give translation theory a firmer theoretical ground. I have followed two loose criteria to draw up the list of the authors I included in this review:

1. Authors that use interpretative semiotics, as opposed to the structuralist or generative traditions of Saussure, Lotman, Jakobson, Greimas, etc. (on the distinction between interpretative and structural semiotics, cf. Eco and Nergaard 1998: 218–220);
2. Authors that focus on translation, as opposed to those who take it as a synecdoche for interpretation, cognition, and semiosis in general.

The second of these criteria is unavoidably vague. I would have liked to write something like 'authors that conceive translation as typical translation scholars do, as opposed to...'. Unfortunately, this is exactly the point on which translation scholars have yet to find an agreement; and contributing to building this consensus is precisely the main goal of the present study. To make up for this lack of precision, let me mention some notable authors I decided to exclude from the list so that you can see the outer limits my criteria draw. I have not included: Jean-René Ladmiral (Ladmiral 1981) because he uses structuralist *sémiologie* and Hjelmslev's theory of language; the great US translator Willis Barnstone (Barnstone 1993, 1994) for his restricted focus on literary texts; and Andrew Chesterman (Chesterman 2002a) for using Greimas's generative semiotics. Other authors I had to leave out with regret include Haroldo de Campos (Campos and Wilder 1982) who

had the best title I've seen in years; Jay Siskin (Siskin 1987) who dug out the roots for our contemporary notion of faithfulness in the Medieval Jewish tradition; José Lambert and Clem Robyns (Lambert and Robyns 2004) who submitted their text 14 years before it was published (Lambert 2005, personal communication); and Paolo Fabbri (Fabbri 2000b) whose apology of the translator as a double agent is a great read. Because walls are built to keep people in as much as to keep them out, Gideon Toury and Peeter Torop are in the list in spite of not meeting the first criterion. I am sure the reasons will be clear when you read about their outstanding contributions.

I have found eight recurrent themes during my exploration of the translation semiotics literature. I would like to list them here as a rough map to help find our bearings amid these rather diverse contributions:

1. Equivalence
2. Borders
3. Nonverbal signs
4. Why is translating difficult?
5. Issues of method
6. From dyadic to triadic discourse
7. The semiotic nature of translation
8. Translation's specificity

Points 1 to 3 are recurrent topics in translation studies literature; going through this review, you will notice that several authors look at them under a new light that reveals fresh features and details. Point 4 is less common. We know that translating can often be intellectually challenging; but why exactly is it so? A semiotic approach draws our attention away from the usual suspects (structural mismatch, *realia*, etc.) and towards more fundamental problems. Both common and less common questions tend to find unexpected answers. This is a consequence of semiotics' radically innovative

approach, as will be clear when we meet points 5 to 7. Point 8 is closest to the core of the present study, which is a theoretical account of translation in general. Let me spend a few words on it. Because of its high level of abstraction, Peirce's theory of signs can hold translation theory as a special case. Some of the authors reviewed noticed this relation and drew useful insights from it. I will collect their observations, ideas, and arguments and use them to answer—or at least articulate—the most elusive of questions: how can one delimit and describe translation as an independent and consistent object of study? You will find these parts assembled into my own model in chapter 4.

3.2 Jakobson. *The beginning*

Roman Jakobson saw the nexus between the theory of signs of Charles S. Peirce and the theory of translation as far back as 1959 in what is perhaps the most cited entry in translation studies literature. The vast majority of quotations are for the three kinds of translation he proposed: interlinguistic (bachelor→'unmarried man'), intralinguistic or translation proper (En. bachelor→Fr. *célibataire*), and intersemiotic (a verbal text into a nonverbal semiotic system). However, this short paper also includes an interesting argument that leads to these classes; let me reconstruct it. The first step is a rebuttal of Bertrand Russell's view of intentionality, which was based on the mind's acquaintance with the referents of language and 'definite descriptions'. Here 'intentionality' refers to the 'aboutness' of terms, the technical sense it has in philosophy since the 19th century when Franz Brentano revived it from medieval scholastics. According to Russell, one's mind could be acquainted with two classes of things: sensory data and universals (eg. colours); and unless one was acquainted with some particular, one could not have a genuine singular thought about it; only a general thought (Jacob Fall 2003). Jakobson could not accept this logical-positivist position, of course. In the late 1950s, structuralism confidently stressed the importance of the web of relations between the terms in a language. Surprisingly though, Jakobson's reply to Russell drew on Peirce—whom he styled "the deepest inquirer into the essence of signs" (Jakobson 1959: 233)—, not on de

Saussure, Hjelmslev, or the representatives of the Linguistic Circles of Moscow and Prague he knew well. He argued that Russell was wrong because “the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign, especially a sign ‘in which it is more fully developed’” (Id.: 232–233). Jakobson picked up this insight of Peirce’s via John Dewey (cf. Id.: 238n2). The quotation is actually from the eighth and last of Peirce’s Lowell lectures of 1903 (CP 5:594) and is part of an argument claiming that a theory of signs must be teleological and pragmatist—ie, that all signs (including all thought) are directed towards a (potential and conceivable) practical consequence. The stage Peirce’s semiotics had reached in 1903 already involved non-semiotic entities ‘out there’; what he called the dynamical object. According to T.L. Short, Peirce’s view would then mature in 1907 when he drew the full implications of his pragmatism (cf. Short 2004; see 3.12.1 below). I am adding these details to mark the radical difference between Saussure’s *sémiologie* and Peirce’s semiotics.

On this evidence, can one conclude that Jakobson misinterpreted Peirce? Several authors have entered this debate offering different conclusions. According to Bonfantini, who was commenting on Jakobson’s opening report at the First International Congress of Semiotics delivered in Milan in 1974 (Jakobson 1981), the Russian linguist misunderstood Peirce for two main reasons: i) he limited signification to *renvoi*; and ii) he limited interpretation to “the application of pre-existing automatic rules that translate a sign into another system of signs” (Bonfantini 1987: 113, my translation). Eco and Nergaard have a softer approach and describe the 1959 paper as an “intersection between structural and interpretative semiotics” (Eco and Nergaard 1998: 219). Of course, it all depends on how one characterises this intersection. In particular, Bonfantini seems to imply that Jakobson presented Peirce’s intrinsic translatability of signs as an endorsement of structuralist *sémiologie*. Also, it is not clear how he interpreted Peirce’s phrase ‘more fully developed’. His examples include ‘bachelor’→‘unmarried man’ (Jakobson 1959: 233), ‘cheese’→Russian *syr/tvorog* (Ibid.), and ‘sunset’ and ‘sunrise’→the picture of a rotating planet (Id. 234)—which parallel his three kinds of translation.

Another debated point is Jakobson's extension of translation to inter-semiotic translation. This extension is a mixed blessing: on the one hand, it helped us think of translation as a semiotic event that does not necessarily involve language; on the other hand, it is a bit of a misnomer. As Lawendowski commented: "'intersemiotic' processes are not really intersemiotic since they automatically involve language. They are, for want of a better term, 'semio-linguistic'" (Lawendowski 1978: 280–281). A few years later, Toury gave us three reasons why he was not happy with Jakobson's typology of translation (Toury 1986: 1113). First—like Lawendowski—he thought the typology was "affected with the traditional bias for *linguistic* translating" (Ibid.). Second, the typology was not satisfactory because "it [was] readily applicable only to *texts*, that is, to semiotic entities which have surface, overt representations" (Ibid.). Third, the typology did not account for the fact that "when undergoing an act of translating, [texts] may have *more* than one semiotic border to cross (e.g., when an oral story in one language becomes a literary, written one in another [...])" (Ibid.). Gorrée accused Jakobson of "forcing Peirce into a structuralist straightjacket" (Gorrée 1994: 148). Cosculluela, following Deledalle–Rhodes, is more lenient: we should not blame Jakobson for giving non-verbal signs the cold shoulder, because his article is quite explicitly about the interpretation of *verbal* signs (Cosculluela 2003: 113–5).

My conclusion is that both debates—forcing Peirce's semiotics into structuralist *sémiologie* and the issue of inter-semiotic translation—are slightly beside the point, because Jakobson was more preoccupied with how language worked than with translation. I believe that what Jakobson found in Peirce was an excellent tool with which to turn the tables between ordinary language use and translation: it is not the case that we can translate because we are proficient in two or more languages; rather, it is thanks to the intrinsic translatability of the linguistic sign that we can speak at all. Indeed, Jakobson stated that "[e]quivalence in difference", which he had just exemplified using translation, "is the cardinal problem of language and the pivotal concern of linguistics" (Id.: 233). This is the likely reason why intralingual translation becomes a form of translation in its own right. Even though Jakobson's vision of Peirce was blurred and he was probably concerned with

language rather than with translation, he should be credited with having noticed the semiotic nature of translation (our theme number 6) very early on. It is surprising that so few scholars have followed his authoritative and seminal lead. We will see more false starts for the semiotic of translation in the years to come.

3.3 *Early voices*

3.3.1 **Ludskanov**

According to an article published in 1978 but written in 1975–76 (Lawendowski 1978, see next section), “[t]he ‘semiotic’ category of writings on translation [had] been limited to only two works: Jakobson (1959) and Ludskanov (1975)” (Id.: 272). We have already seen Jakobson’s famous paper; this section will report on Ludskanov’s. The author is presented as the director of a machine–translation project in Bulgaria, but his assumptions about translation are not entirely those of an engineer. Ludskanov articulates translation problems under three main headings: practical, theoretical and metatheoretical. Theoretical questions include:

Can we speak of a general notion of translation between L^N [natural languages] whatever the genre of text, or must we proceed genre by genre (literary, political, or technical?) [...] Our reply to this defines (i) the *object* of the theory and (ii) the *relationship* between the genres; because if there is no general theory, then they have nothing in common (Ludskanov 1975: 5).

This apparently innocent passage points at a huge issue under theme number 8—translation’s specificity—that has found no satisfactory solution to this day: does ‘translation’ refer to one, sufficiently definite object of study? I am aware of what this implies for the present study, which moves from the hypothesis that there is such thing as translation in general. However, Ludskanov’s words remind us that this assumption should not be taken for granted. The term ‘translation’ may refer to a cluster of distinct objects after all. This doubt is reinforced by another theoretical question raised by Ludskanov: “Can we speak of translation only between L^N , or between all semiotic

systems?” (Id. 2003: 6). I will follow the author’s cue that the best level of discourse to tackle, if not answer, these questions is metatheoretical. On this third level, he asks: “Is a *science* of translation at all possible? Some deny it. If it is possible, what is its object of study? Where is its place? In literature? In linguistics? [...] How should its taxonomy be organized?” (Ibid.). I will not venture any answer for the moment, because these questions are the very core of the present study. I would only comment that it is very difficult—and probably futile—to articulate such questions in positive and general terms. The reader is kindly referred to chapter 4 where something like a ‘negative–general’ argument is presented. In that chapter I will follow another piece of advice found in this illuminating paper: translation scholars should infer replies not from other fields but from “an analysis of the translation process itself” (Ibid.).

Unfortunately, Ludskanov’s own answers, unlike his questions, are decidedly dated. Translating, for instance, is informally defined as a semiotic transformation that replaces signs in two codes while preserving “*invariant information with respect to a given system of reference*” (Id.: 7). Besides, his preoccupation with machine translation distorts his view. For instance, he states that a fragment like *La masse était grande* is “not fully understandable” (Ibid.), because *masse* may signify ‘physical mass’ and ‘crowd’. In fact, this is a serious problem only for the dyadic kind of sign–action of automatic systems. Lexical ambiguity of this sort rarely constitutes a problem for humans both in nontranslation and translation semiosis. Finally, Ludskanov maintains that translators identify meaning with reference to a “nonambiguous metalanguage” (Id.: 8). This hypothesis has been refuted by Eco and Nergaard as follows. A metalanguage is a system X which expresses the invariant information that needs to be translated from system A to system B. The metalanguage is required to build a bridge between A and B, which otherwise would be disconnected. However, when X appears, I need to build two more bridges: from A to X and from X to B. To do so, and following the same logic, I need systems Y and Z, and so *ad infinitum* (Eco and Nergaard 1998: 220–221).

3.3.2 Lawendowski

Many years before interdisciplinarity became a buzzword in translation studies (cf. Snell–Hornby, Pöchhacker, and Kaindl 1994) Lawendowski realised that making sense of translation implied the convergence of several disciplines. “The semiotic framework may help to bring together the efforts of those analyzing and describing translation only within the confines of their own disciplines” (Lawendowski 1978: 266). In effect, after a bird’s eye survey of the studies on translation and interpreting put forward in the 1960s and 1970s, the author makes a daring prediction:

A future theory of translation will have a semiotic framework embracing not only language but other anthropo– and zoosemiotic systems, although the priority will no doubt rest with language. In order to work out such a framework, which would unify the presently dispersed and individualistic approaches to translation, interdisciplinary cooperation is necessary. (Id.: 272).

I would very much like to regard this quotation as a methodological prophecy (theme number 5): however, I am not totally sure that the contributions—old and new—that are reviewed in this section will bear me out.

Lawendowski’s main interest is the study of interpretation and, more generally, of forms different from traditional print translation, including what is now known as multimedia translation. Some of his examples and insights would be precious for any researcher in those fields. The overall conclusions of his discussion are still very relevant for us today; here is one: “Can we translate messages in Van Gogh’s pictures, violin concertos, or Navajo rug design?” (Id.: 280). This question points to the limits of the notion of translation in the most general terms. Recalling Lawendowski’s critique of Jakobson’s three kinds of translation given under 3.2 above, the author calls for a notion of translation that is no longer limited to natural–language constraints: “A process closer to the intersemiotic exchange should embrace direct interaction of non–verbal elements, without the go–between of language” (Id.: 281). At the same time, he states that “we cannot ‘translate’ Van Gogh’s powerful messages, but, while receiving them visually, we ‘process’ them in a number of ways”

(Ibid.), and these include verbal expression. In sum, the author proposes semiotic processing as an alternative to intersemiotic translation, transmutation, etc.; but this is a risky move, because it threatens translation's own ontological position. At any rate, Lawendowski's main contribution to the semiotics of translation is on the theme of nonverbal signs (number 3). His argument takes Jakobson at face value: if there is such thing as 'intersemiotic' translation, then one can entertain the idea of a form of translation that does not involve natural language at all. Let me repeat in passing that this kind of insight is encouraged by semiotic approaches because the main object of study of semiotics is not language but signs in general.

3.3.3 Van Kesteren

The proceedings of the famous "Literature and Translation" conference held in Leuven, Belgium, in 1976 include one contribution that unambiguously applies a few well-chosen parts of Peirce's semiotics to the theory of translation (Kesteren 1978). This article is the second notable false start for translation semiotics. As was the case for Jakobson's 1959 paper, it is surprising that so few scholars have followed the lead of a text published in a collection that helped establish a mainstream paradigm in contemporary translation research. Van Kesteren states his plan in simple terms:

The goal of this attempt is to develop a semiotic model for translation theory. More specifically, a *typology of equivalence relationships* between a source text and a target text will be established [...]. For this purpose I shall make use of various concepts developed long ago by Peirce [...] (Id.: 48).

The argument is supported throughout by a comparison of Herman Hesse's poem "September" and its translation into English by William Mann. Van Kesteren knows his Peirce well and his interpretation is guided by two German authors: Max Bense and Elisabeth Walther. Charles Morris is also mentioned to a more limited extent. Apart from a lucid and compact illustration of Peirce's definition of sign, Van Kesteren employs a single but powerful concept by him: the three

trichotomies he used in his classification of signs of 1903 (CP 2.227–272; see 2.10 above and sub-sections). Peirce combined these three-way divisions to arrive at ten composite classes; Van Kesteren wisely stops short of using all these combinations and uses the bare elements instead which—let me remind you—are:

- Qualisign, Sinsign, and Legisign about the sign in itself;
- Icon, Index, and Symbol about the sign-object relation;
- Rheme, Dicisign, and Argument about the sign-interpretant relation.

The middle triad is by far the best known and can be traced back to Peirce's first philosophical publication of 1867 ("On a New List of Categories". *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 7, May 1867: 287–298 at CP 1.545–559).

Van Kesteren's method produces some surprising results: for instance "[w]ithin machine translation marked use is made of an assumed sinsign equivalence" (Kesteren 1978: 54), which is a brilliant insight. Also, icon, index and symbol equivalence correspond to similarities at the level of semantic structure, theme, and basic semantic invariant respectively (Van Kesteren uses Doležel's notions of motif, motifeme and archimotifeme). Please notice the gain in analytical detail and terminological accuracy in this, the most intuitive type of equivalence assessment. Finally, 'rhema equivalence' is made to correspond to equivalence of stylistic elements, which is another clever association. Style, often the most elusive topic in the treatment of equivalence, acquires a much neater determination in the company of the other eight viewpoints on equivalence.

The strategy throughout is to analyse both the source and the target text under the point of view afforded by each of these nine elements and to assess the similarity among the two texts under that same respect. In other words, the nine classes are used to cut the notion of equivalence like a precious stone. The method pares down the texts in two nine-faced solids which are then turned in synch to compare the faces two by two. The method is very clever; however, it risks an excessive reification of the translation process. Regarding source and target texts as parallel entities, each

within its own sign–object–interpretant triad, would not be the only possible way to use these parameters. For instance, rather than keeping source and target on parallel lines of analysis, one could assume that the target text is a representation of the source text. Under this assumption, one would be looking at just one triad in which the source is the object, the target is the sign, and the target receivers—including the analyst—occupy the position of the interpretant (Cosculluela 2003 puts forward a third method, see 3.9 below).

In spite of the obvious limitations of this short paper and although its age is beginning to show, “Equivalence Relationships” is the earliest example I found of a working semiotic method applied to the analysis of translation equivalence. Therefore, although it scores both under theme 1 and 5, I have no doubt it gains most of its points under the latter heading. “Equivalence Relationships” deserves to be regarded as one of translation studies’ classics. I would like to quote its optimistic and uplifting ending:

I am convinced that semiotic procedures such as those I have adapted [...] can lead to positive results within the field of translation theory, particularly with regard to equivalence relationships, and to less ambiguous terminology than has been used up till now (Id.: 66).

3.4 Toury. A proto–Peircean approach

The monumental *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics* Thomas Sebeok edited in 1986 has an entry on translation. Three pieces are included under the entry; the second and largest of which is by Gideon Toury (Toury 1986). I believe that this is one of the central texts in the semiotic reflection on translation: insightful, challenging, and rewarding. Although it makes reference only to structural semioticians such as Lotman and Uspenskij, its main insights make a lot of sense from a Peircean perspective. I also regard this essay as the third notable false start for the semiotics of translation. It is true that it appeared in a work that was not clearly addressed to translation scholars;

however, Gideon Toury is one the most influential authors in the field. Again, one is left to wonder why it did not generate a larger wave of interest.

Toury sets out trying to put a little order in our terminology, distinguishing between translating (an event), translatability (an abstract condition) and translations (object-like entities). Translating is then described as “an act (or a process) which is performed (or occurs) over and across systemic borders” (Id.: 1112). Please note the stress on the event-like nature of translating and on the difference between semiotic systems as a distinctive feature. The critique of Jakobson’s typology is next to which an alternative classification is proposed based on the root distinction between intrasemiotic and intersemiotic translation (cf. Eco and Nergaard 1998: 220). Translating is described as a process in four stages: decomposition, selection, transfer and [re]composition. I would not agree that these stages account for translating in fundamental terms, I am especially sceptical about the privileged position accorded to transfer (see 6.3 below for a fuller criticism of this notion and 7.2 for an alternative proposal). However, what counts is the next remark: “in practice”, writes Toury, “the borderlines between the four successive phases are not clear-cut; in other words, the process of translating is a *non-interrupted continuum* rather than a series of discrete phases” (Id.: 1114). This formulation struck me as very close to Peirce’s recurrent notion of continuity or ‘synechism’ (eg, CP 6.169 and ff., 1901–2). I fully subscribe to this proposition; in fact, I would take one more step: the continuity of translation events does not belong with phenomenology, but with metaphysics.

After referring to translation’s ‘*differentia specifica*’ in the opening paragraphs, Toury describes translating as “a type of semiotic activity” (Id.: 1115). There is no doubt about this, but what are the implications of describing the relationship between semiotic activity and translating in terms of *genus* and *species*? Is translating a species of all semiosis or of a more restricted *genus*—say, verbal language? What is the ontological status of the *differentia specifica* that should distinguish translating from other species in the same genus—eg, other forms of re-writing? In particular, is the *differentia* a vague and potential character? Is it an identifiable object, fact or relation? Is it a fully

fledged law-like concept like the *differentia* between legitimate and counterfeit money? Finally, should we not consider alternatives to *genus*-and-*species* relations, such as—for instance—the prototype-category approach proposed by Sandra Halverson (Halverson 1999)?

This characterisation is included in a crucial paragraph for the development of Toury's argument: "[...] translating as a type of semiotic activity does not require the existence of any relationships between the two respective (sub)systems and codes. In other words, whatever these relations, translating may be said to take place as soon as the other conditions have been met" (Toury 1986: 1115). What this means in detail is explained a little later: translating is totally a function of target-side norms. What is also implied is even more interesting: within certain constraints and possibilities, translating establishes relations between signs in full autonomy. This corresponds to my belief that the task of the translator is *making* two signs similar across a semiotic barrier. This also means that all equivalence is born of inferential processes because "translating is not to be conceived of as a mere automatic outcome of the initial relational potential of the two systems involved" (Ibid.).

It only takes a little step to see that Toury is actually comparing semioses marked by what Peirce called secondness and thirdness (see 2.4.1 above). The fact that translating cannot be an automatic process implies, among other things, that in genuine translation semiosis source and target systems do not possess "a more-or-less defined set of rules for the substitution of entities encoded in one of them for entities encoded in the other" (Id.: 1117). If this is correct, there would be little hope for the sets of rules which operate in today's translating machines. In fact, genuine translation semiosis follows three steps: i) possible solutions to translation problems are found through inference; ii) they become stable through appropriate tests; and iii) they generate what Peirce would call *habits* (see 2.7 above and its subsection). Rule-governed dyadic systems are in principle reversible; inference-based triadic systems are not. This is why "translating has to be conceived as an *irreversible* process, and the equivalence relationships—as *unidirectional*" (Id.: 1116). Triadic systems can also evolve: "translatability between systems that are constantly in contact via

translating may well change and its extent increase” (Ibid.). Comparing automatic and genuine translation, Toury writes:

“the [unidirectional] relationships established between the target and the source texts are not a function of any other set of relationships that has logical priority over them, but a result of the interplay of *all* the cultural, textual and linguistic factors involved in every single act of performance, hence not necessarily the same in all cases” (Id.: 117).

It is true that automatic semiosis obeys ‘logically prior relationships’. Indeed, keeping the example of machine translation, each step a machine takes is perfectly determined by its algorithm like the movement of a red ball is determined by the cue. Genuine semiosis, in contrast, is dominated by inference, which is free—within limits—to follow, bend or flout norms in pursuit of its internal goal.

Is the process of translation semiosis totally independent from other factors, then? Certainly not, Toury speaks of constraints that determine the degree of translatability. The degree of translatability is measured against the “postulate of maximal (or even optimal) equivalence” (Id.: 1115) and is a polar, not a binary notion. Again, I would subscribe to each and every word, with this one doubt: why describe the pre-translational relations between two semiotic systems in terms of “initial *constraints* on any act of translating”? (Ibid.). When I am faced with a translation problem, I can see first a sign’s potential to grow on the target side and only later the constraints. Of course, there are barriers to negotiate, and some are higher than others. However the specific kind of sign-action we call translating does not occur in spite of these barriers; it occurs *because of* them. If it weren’t for the special semiotic work these barriers require, it would not be translating in the first place.

The most general translation norms of all are the requirements that, within each culture, a text must meet to be regarded as a translation. Toury insists that these requirements are set “*in and by the recipient system*” (Toury 1986: 1119), which is obvious if you define them as norms. However, is it possible to analyse this set of requirements further? Are there requirements whose determination is not totally defined in and by the recipient system? And if there are, how are they

linked to the other conditions, criteria, norms, postulates, possibilities and constraints that draw the lines on the ground and set the rules of the translation game? Toury seems to believe in the existence of culture-independent requirements. They are: “an assumed source text”, “retain[ing] an invariant core”, “cross-linguality”, and “*inter-* (or cross-) systemic type of information transmission” (Id.: 1120). A later work includes a shorter list:

- (1) The Source-Text Postulate;
- (2) The Transfer Postulate;
- (3) The Relationship Postulate (Toury 1995: 33).

What did not change in the two versions is how the postulates are presented, especially the notion of ‘assumed source text’. What does it mean that a source text need not be factually existent but merely assumed? I will try to reconstruct Toury’s argument using my own terms: a text cannot pass muster as a translation if it does not provide its audience with enough evidence to allow them to infer the existence of a source text on which the text itself is based (cf. Toury 1986: 1119; Toury 1995: 33–35). The same logic applies to the other postulates. As a consequence, the postulates are “posited rather than factual; at least not of necessity. Therefore, rather than constituting answers, they give rise to questions to be addressed by anyone wishing to study translation in context” (Toury 1995: 33). With this formulation, Toury tries to clarify the ontological status of these requirements, but what is their status in terms of Peirce’s categories? Let us accept, for the sake of argument, that a source text need exist only as an assumption; is this assumption historically determined (a third) or is it a logical condition to any historical determination (a first)? I believe the latter is the case. Let us again take the source-text postulate as our example: can we imagine a community that defines translation according to a set of norms and requirements that makes no reference to it—ie, that doesn’t involve a semiotic event that belongs in another semiotic system? This is patently absurd, so the postulate is part of the logico-semiotic conditions to translation in general. Again, the same applies to the other conditions.

Articulating a theoretical discourse in terms of postulates (firsts) and norms (third) is in full accordance with a semiotic model of translation. As to the postulates' content, however, there is a fundamental discrepancy. As we have seen earlier, in the 1986 version, Toury's postulates included reference to 'transfer' and 'invariant core', therefore they seemed to endorse a view of translation I call 'parcel in the mail' (see 6.3 below). In it, translating is depicted as a series of operations that move object-like entities (the invariant core) from one semiotic space to another. This is consistent with the idea handed down by the very etymology of the term 'translation': *transfere*, 'to carry across'. More generally, it is consistent with a conception of verbal communication based on encoding and decoding (which I will oppose in 5.3.1 below using Relevance theory). In contrast, the model I am using in this study regards decoding as just one component of communication and semiosis. I maintain that interpretive semiotics focuses on the inferential processes that lie at the heart of sign-action. Translation semiosis is no exception in this respect. In chapter 4 I will propose a totally different set of first characters that accounts for the fact that nothing gets transferred in translation.

Finally, the clearest proto-Peircean argument in this article is the one that establishes a link between translatability, acts and norms. Translatability is described as "the initial potential" (Id.: 1115) that acts of translating would realize. The carrying out of an act of translating, in its turn, is determined by "cultural (general and/or specific) *norms*" (Id.: 1116). The series: translatability-acts of translating-norms is without a doubt a Peircean One-Two-Three series and closely corresponds to the outer layer of my model. I have two provisions to make. First, as I wrote earlier, one should consider translatability more as the condition to and potential for translation semiosis rather than as a constraint. Second, one should clarify the internal logical continuity of the series. There are no translation norms without acts of translation and translatability; and there are no acts of translation without translatability. This Peircean set of Chinese boxes (eg, CP 2.353, c. 1880) is consistent with another passage in the paper. Page 1121 reads that the process of translating precedes the product *in time*, however "from the *semiotic* point of view, the (potential) product, and especially its

(prospective) position and functions in the target system, should be assigned precedence over the process”. Again, this makes perfect Peircean sense: insofar as product and position are potential they belong with firstness and are therefore logically more fundamental than actual translating (a second).

To conclude, the take-home messages of “Translation. A Cultural–Semiotic Perspective” are: i) the notion of border as a definitorial condition to T–semiosis and ii) a detailed account of aspects of translating that bear out its semiotic nature. Thus this essay contributes to themes number 2 and 7. It is also a strange essay, because although its arguments do not move from interpretive semiotics—at least not explicitly—its conclusions are largely compatible with it. In particular, I have found a large degree of complementarity between Toury’s positions and my abstract model of translation, especially the translatability–acts of translating–norms series which prefigures the Foundation—events—norms triad that I have introduced in chapter 1 and will articulate in chapter 4. I have also found at least one big difference: the argument I will present later mainly belongs with firstness—ie, the conditions to T–semiosis—whereas Toury’s focus remains on cultural and historical determinations that belong with thirdness.

3.5 *False trails*

The literature on the semiotics of translation includes a number of contributions that have not helped much the establishment of the field; this section includes a small sample of them.

The first example is from Julio Jeha (Jeha 1997) who opens his article on intersemiotic translation with an interesting insight. Commenting the vexed question of the rendition of a book into a film, he states that these two texts are not meant to be compared because they belong to different semiotic systems; comparing them: “amounts to little more than stating one’s preference of apples to apple pie” (Id.: 639). What one should do, in fact, is either comparing different apples from the same bushel or comparing different apple–pie recipes. Jeha rightly believes that

intersemiotic translation is already established and defined as a by-product of Peirce's view of meaning. However, when he tries to make his point with a Peirce quotation similar to the one used by Jakobson, this is what happened: "meaning is 'the translation of a sign into another system of signs' (CP 4.127), which renders every sign translatable into an endless series of other signs (CP 2.293 note)" (Id.: 640). Paragraphs 4.127 and 2.293 of Peirce's *Collected Papers* are from 1897 and 1903 respectively, and it takes a lot of gall to stitch them together in the same sentence. Moreover, the latter is not about signs at all but about the immediate object of a symbol which "if it has in its own nature another kind of object, this must be by an **endless series** (CP 2.293n)". On this basis, the author goes on to claim that understanding across cultural and other barriers is always ensured by communicational interpretants, which exceed language codes to include "all that universe of experience to which reference is made" (Id.: 640). The final section of the paper is a discussion about the referent of signs and includes this statement: "Peircean theory postulates generation of meaning whenever intersemiotic translation occurs" (Id.: 642). This is obvious, since "[e]very process of translation [is] an act of semiosis" (Id.: 641); but it is not harmless, because it actually identifies translation with semiosis in general. "In an endless chain of ever-growing symbolic signs, intersemiotic translation equals meaning production" (Id.: 642). If this were the case, why write a paper on intersemiotic translation? Every predication ascribed to translation would equally apply to all semiosis, and our topic of investigation would disappear like a glass of water poured into the sea.

My second example is by Tomaselli and Shepperson from the same collection (Tomaselli and Shepperson 1997). The crux of this very brief article is that the encounter between oral and literate cultures is problematic because "[o]ral cultures speak a different world to those of written cultures" (Id.: 879). Peirce's conception of 'phaneron' is then made to account for Quine's notion of indeterminacy. Peirce wrote: "I use the word **phaneron** to mean all that is present to the mind in any sense or in any way whatsoever, regardless of whether it be fact or figment" (CP 8.312, 1905). The authors' argument is that the phaneron—unlike Kant's phenomenon—includes experience, therefore "[t]he concrete encounter of a subject within a phaneron means that what is experienced

will incorporate the accumulated consequences of previous differences of experience. The relevant differences are ontological [...]” (Id.: 880). This is fairly unproblematic, although if you insist too much on these differences you can no longer account for the remarkable rate of success humans have in their dialogue with each other, including with fellow humans from faraway places and distant times. But why employ a difficult and complex notion like Peirce’s phaneron to restate this simple fact? The paper reaches this conclusion: “[a]s agent, the communicator can turn to another agent and point to significant things” (Ibid.)—which would figure well as a dictionary example for the entry ‘truism’.

The third and final example is by Douglas Robinson. Chapters 5 to 11 of *Becoming a Translator* (Robinson 1997a) are structured following the familiar Peircean series abduction, induction and deduction (see 2.9 above). The reason for this is given as follows: “[o]ne useful way of mapping the connections between experience and habit onto the process of translation is through the work of Charles Sanders Peirce (1857–1913), the American philosopher and founder of semiotics” (Id.: 96–97).⁶ The author correctly identifies a useful application of Peirce’s philosophy to translating: if translating is a problem-solving exercise, his reasoning goes, induction and deduction are not enough; hypothetical reasoning or ‘abduction’ is also required. Robinson’s insight is that, for certain problems, translators need to guess their solutions. This is in line with interpretive semiotics and vindicates the creative side of translating: “[a]bduction is the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis. It is the only logical operation which introduces any new idea; for induction does nothing but determine a value, and deduction merely evolves the necessary consequences of a pure hypothesis” (CP 5.171, 1903). However, the experiential account Robinson gives does not agree with Peirce, who explained what he meant by induction, deduction and abduction in the “Illustrations of the Logic of Science” series appeared in *The Popular Science Monthly* in 1877–8

⁶ In point of fact, Peirce was born on 10 September 1839 in Cambridge (Mass) to Benjamin and Sarah Hunt (Mills) and died on 19 April 1914 at his farmhouse just north of Milford (Penn) he had called Arisbe.

(three articles in particular have become famous among Peirce scholars: "The Fixation of Belief" vol. 12 (Nov. 1877): 1–15 (CP 5.358–387); "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" vol. 12 (Jan. 1878): 286–302 (CP 5.388–410); and, to a lesser extent, "Deduction, Induction, and Hypothesis" vol. 13 (Aug. 1878): 470–482 (CP 2.619–644). Good secondary literature on the three forms of reasoning includes Bonfantini 1987 and Hookway 2002).

The author writes:

The translator approaches new texts, new jobs, new situations with an intuitive or *instinctive* readiness, a sense of her or his own knack for languages and translation that is increasingly, with experience, steeped in the automatisms of habit. Instinct and habit for Peirce were both, you will remember, a readiness to act; the only difference between them is that habit is directed by experience (Robinson 1997a: 104–105).

This is odd on two counts. Firstly, Peirce maintained that the kind of mental activity he called *inquiry* started with experience—more specifically, when we have evidence that our existing beliefs are no longer valid. When this happens “[t]he irritation of doubt causes a struggle to attain a state of belief” (CP 5.374, 1877). My objection is that not every new text will destabilise a translator’s existing habits of conduct, especially those established by conscious beliefs. Secondly, there is a world of difference between our instinct and habits—and experience has little to do with it. We have already seen that Peirce’s main interest in instinct was related to our ability to form hypotheses and he often discussed our remarkable rate of success (eg, CP 2.86, 1902 and 7.220, 1901; see also Ch. 6). As to habit—of which belief is one form—Peirce maintained “that the production of belief is the sole function of thought” (CP 5.394, 1877). So, although hypotheses must be tested against experiential data, phenomenologically the passage between forming a hypothesis and forming the kind of deliberate habits translators use in their semioses is effected by thought and by thought alone. In fact, experience marks both ends of the process of inquiry: first, as I said earlier, it sets the process in motion; second, the deliberate “establishment in our nature of a rule of action” (CP 5.397, 1877) defines its end.

Finally, Robinson seems to have surprising reservations about habits themselves. “As Peirce conceives the movement from instinct through experience to habit, habit is the *end*: instinct and experience are combined to create habit, and there it stops”. (Robinson 1997a: 103–4). Also: “[t]he third stage is retention, which corresponds to Peirce’s notion of habit. Unlike Peirce, however, Weick refuses to see retention as the stable goal of the whole process” (Id.: 101). This is evidence of a very serious misunderstanding of the core of pragmatism. A short quotation will suffice to prove these statements wrong: “[...] since belief is a rule for action, the application of which involves further doubt and further thought, at the same time that it is a stopping–place, it is also a new starting–place for thought” (CP 5.397, 1877. For a fuller discussion of habit, see 2.7 above).

You will have noticed that I am closing the treatment of most authors with a paragraph indicating how they have contributed to the semiotics of translation. It will be clear to you that this is not possible here. Authors like Jeha, Tomaselli, Shepperson, and Robinson teach us a simpler lesson about the dangers of interdisciplinarity and remind us that sometimes having too little Peirce is worse than having no Peirce at all.

3.6 *Restricted applications*

Before tackling the big players that are shaping the field of translation semiotics, I would like to review a few interesting contributions with a narrower scope.

3.6.1 Adab

In 1997, Beverly Adab brought out two articles whose titles included the phrase ‘Semiotics and the Teaching of Translation’ (Adab 1997a; Adab 1997b). The texts are very similar in outlook, line of argument, and verbal content; in fact, the only notable differences are the examples used and a few editorial changes. I will review 1997a. Adab’s argument rests on an impeccable assumption: “translation is but one form of interpretation of one sign by another” (Id.: 56). Her application of

Peirce's semiotics, however, is restricted to the icon, index, symbol triad and is limited to the teaching of translation. More specifically, Adab believes that the three classes of sign-object relations may "assist in the interpretation of the ST message and the reconstruction of this message in the TL" (Id.: 54). One can already observe that the view of translation implied is one of transfer between language codes, which is difficult to reconcile with a Peircean semiotic approach. In spite of this, even this piecemeal application of Peirce's theory of sign amply justifies the following claim: "At the level of the macro- and microstructure, the semiotics of Peirce can offer a complementary methodology to existing approaches to source-text analysis for the purpose of translation" (Id.: 55). The operative term is, of course, 'complementary'; semiotics need not be a form of integralism and it can be a bedfellow of several other approaches. Having said that, I would have preferred a less libertine mix of structuralist and interpretative semiotics. Bearing in mind that Peirce's sign is conceived as a triad, Adab wrote:

Every sign, whether natural or non-natural, is composed of:

* the 'signifier'—the material form of the sign—The written word 'table'

* the 'signified'—the concept it represents. The category or functional object known as 'table'" (Ibid.).

It appears that Adab's source on Peirce is Gorlée 1994 (cf. Adab 1997a: 56), which may explain why she puts so much stress on unlimited semiosis and gives so little regard to Peirce's mature pragmatism. Adab solves this problem by adopting the commonsense view that semiosis is potentially unlimited but comes to an end for purely practical reasons: "once the sign interpreter is satisfied that the source term has been adequately reinterpreted in the new sign" (Adab 1997a: 56).

In spite of a debatable reconstruction of the icon, index, symbol triad, the paper includes two useful remarks:

Semiotics can help to remind us that we are always dealing with signs, not with an unmediated objective reality, and that sign systems are involved in the construction of meaning (Id.: 57).

Introducing students to concepts of Peircean semiotics can help to wean them away from the word-dependent form of ST analysis. It can also provide further metaconcepts and new elements of a metalanguage with which to rationalise, explain and justify choices made during the translation process (Id.: 58).

I regard these as very promising paths for future research. As to the latter, I can personally testify to its validity. Regarding translating as a full-fledged semiotic act has had a hugely liberating and empowering impact on my practice. Thanks to semiotics, I could bring my clients and colleagues past the wordsmith stage (take this message and substitute its words) and I could offer them my multilingual communication expertise—which every well-trained translator develops in time.

3.6.2 The Kouvola centre

In 2001 Helsinki University Press brought out a collection of essays to celebrate the Department of translation studies of the University of Helsinki at Kouvola 20 years after it became a Department and 30 years since its foundation. For some time before 2001, Kouvola had been home of the world's only centre explicitly open to the semiotics of translation. This was mainly due to the entrepreneurial spirit of Pirjo Kukkonen, who has since moved to Helsinki. The publication includes contributions in English (mostly), Finnish, Russian and German. The topics are also mixed; ranging from descriptive studies to sundry papers on norms, linguistics, history, ideology, etc. (cf. Stecconi 2002, on which this sub-section draws). Because of the Kouvola centre's focus on semiotics, several papers approach translation from a semiotic angle and many of them from the semiotics of C.S. Peirce. Johan Franzon's contribution (Franzon 2001) finds a useful—if tangential—application to popular songs, which is a type of syncretic text. This is a typical application of semiotic approaches, because traditional language-centred models find it difficult to

account for texts that, like songs, weave verbal language and music together. Peeter Torop's contribution (Torop 2001a) proves that semiotics and translation studies have already given birth to an interdiscipline. Time will show how strong and productive it is. Finally, Dinda Gorlée's contribution (Gorlée 2001) is a bird's-eye view of the birth and development of the notion of text in the past century. It does not matter that this latter paper makes no explicit reference to translation as such. Any thinking translator knows that without a satisfactory and workable idea of text s/he will never be *knowledgeable* and *aware* of what s/he does (cf. Hartama–Heinonen 2001; Deledalle–Rhodes 1994). The strongest piece in the collection is Pirjo Kukkonen's, which is clearly focussed on Peircean semiotics. Its opening lines include this statement:

For translation studies, the question of interpretation is fundamental, a semiotic point of view seems therefore to be a relevant one, if we consider translation processes and their products as well as theoretical and methodological approaches implying a study of signs and different sign systems in *semiosis*, the act of producing and interpreting signs (Kukkonen 2001: 121).

Translation implies a special form of interpretation, at least phenomenologically. Translators normally have a very close reading of their sources and must produce a verifiable practical outcome in the form of a target text. Unlike most other interpreters, they are absolutely compelled to choose one particular interpretant among the many possible interpretants for a source text and they are required to make it manifest in their target texts. On the other hand, one should be careful not to reduce the problems of translation to the problems of interpretation because translation semiosis shows certain features that sets it apart from other forms of semiosis. This is a recurring risk when translation is discussed in semiotic terms and the present study includes several warnings against it (see, eg. 4.2 below).

3.7 Deledalle–Rhodes. Broadening the scope

Janice Deledalle–Rhodes developed her semiotics of translation in a series of articles published between 1989 and 1996 (Deledalle–Rhodes 1988–1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1994, 1996). The author, now retired, was associated with the Institut de Recherche en Sémiotique, Communication et Éducation of the university of Perpignan, France. The earliest paper I could locate (Deledalle–Rhodes 1988–1989), explores translation in a very broad sense indeed. She sets out her argument stating that she does not cover “the problem of translation in the current sense of the term and consider instead those translation activities that we carry out every day” (Id.: 211, all translations in this section are mine). After a passing reference to the ‘translation’ of inner feelings into words, she reviews an array of transfers—defined as “translating or transposing something in the terms of something else” (Id.: 212)—involving theatre (staging a script), painting (perspective and colour), and music (composing, performing, listening). The analysis of verbal information sometimes included in a score (*allegro*, *largo*, *moderato*, etc.) and of ‘descriptive music’ (Beethoven’s *Pastoral*) are particularly interesting. Deledalle–Rhodes often uses the notion of ‘field of interpretants’ in these analyses. Commenting on theatre, for instance, she writes:

The *representamen* is the written text; the object is the performance staged by the director with the help of his actors. This object may produce several fields of *interpretant*, as proved by the number of different or even diverging versions of one and the same text by Shakespeare that have been produced in the last few years (Ibid.)

The author justifies her use of examples from the arts because “an approach to translation that looked only to the issues of translating from one language into another would not clarify and define the picture; rather, it would make it more complicated and muddled” (Id.: 218). Like Cosculluela and Petrilli after her (see 3.9 and 3.11 below), Deledalle–Rhodes believes the real problems of translation have little to do with verbal language: “the one and only problem of translation is that of the *interpretant*, which is essentially a semiotic problem and only incidentally a linguistic one” (Id.: 221). Here is a bolder expression of this position:

The only way in which translators can begin to understand the *nature* of their problems would appear to be by recognizing that the linguistic or literary sign is only part of a *general sign-system*, the most inclusive to date being that of Peirce. When the vital role played by the Interpretant in the process of sign-transposition known as translation has been recognised, the problems encountered by translators will be reduced to the level of mere technicalities (Deledalle–Rhodes 1990b: 108).

In effect, the author clarifies that one and the same principle is involved in all the broad forms of translation and transposition she identified. This is how she describes it:

The goal of a translator [...] is to produce with her text the same impression, the same sense as those produced by the original text. In other words, she will produce a *representamen* B that triggers the same *interpretants* as *representamen* A and that creates an object B which—*mutatis mutandis*—corresponds to object A (Deledalle–Rhodes 1988–1989: 218–9).

This simple picture becomes more sophisticated in “The Transposition of the Linguistic Sign in Peirce's Contributions to The Nation” (Deledalle–Rhodes 1996), which is a detailed commentary of a series of Peirce’s remarks that involved translation in one way or another. The corpus used for this study is a set of about 340 book reviews, notes and replies Peirce wrote for the journal *The Nation* between 1869 and 1908 “to supplement his meagre income” (Id.: 669). The harvest is not spectacular, because “translation as an intellectual activity had at that time an inferior status, and did not appear to merit any particular study or reflection” (Id.: 680). In other words, Peirce did not draw the implications of his theories for translation, which is precisely what Deledalle–Rhodes does in the best parts of this paper. The author presents one of Peirce’s many philosophical innovation; the distinction between dynamic and immediate object which, together with his notions of the interpretant and of continuous semiosis, “implies the possibility of differing texts referring to the ‘same’ object for different readers at different times” (Id.: 676). The author stresses the innovative character of this discovery for translation. Before Peirce, she claims, the dominant view was that of a “‘real’ Object in the text which [could] easily be conveyed into another language by a literal

transposition of the linguistic sign” (Ibid.). Let me add that this view may no longer be dominant, but still pollutes vast regions of our intellectual environment. I agree with the author that this is one of translation’s ‘fundamental problems’, because—strictly speaking—no two texts or signs can refer to the same object if their interpretants are different, and in principle they always are. Considering the most typical semiotic barrier, the barrier between natural languages, Deledalle–Rhodes remarks that “it is difficult to see how a text–sign in one language could be the exact equivalent of another text–sign in another language. Indeed, if it were possible theoretically to conceive this we would have the *same* sign, and thus not a translated one” (Id.: 678). In sum, a strict notion of equivalence is deemed as inconceivable from whichever respect you may look at it.

Glossing a comment Peirce made on a German text translated into English, Deledalle–Rhodes writes: “how must the representamen be modified in order that the interpretants of the English reader shall produce an object identical to that of the German text?” (Id.: 676). As you can see, this reprises the author’s view of translation presented above. However, like good wine, her model grew richer over the years:

given that a certain representamen in the source language refers to a certain object through the mediation of certain interpretants, the translator’s task is first, to ascertain (if he does not already know) what interpretant will be operative in the target language, and secondly to modify the representamen in terms of those interpretants, so that a same or similar object will be produced (Id.: 679).

The focus has shifted towards an analysis of source and target interpretants. “[A] text describing a scientific experiment, of which the scientific interpretants are common to both languages will, if correctly translated, produce an object identical to that of the source text” (Ibid.). In contrast, the translator of a philosophical text may find that the interpretant she finds on the source side are missing from the target environment. In such cases “one cannot say that the translated sign is equivalent to the original sign, but that *mutatis mutandis*, it produces what appears to be a similar object; it is, as Peirce says, ‘representative’ of the original sign”. (Id.: 680).

I would like to point out one problematic aspect shared by all these quotations: Deledalle–Rhodes consistently maintains that the object is ‘produced’ by the interpretant. For the author, semiosis follows the representamen–interpretant–object sequence rather than the object–representamen (or sign)–interpretant sequence I have been using throughout the present study. This re–ordering reflects a different understanding of Peirce’s theory of sign. Deledalle–Rhodes believes that “the sign is composed of three elements, or rather characterized by three aspects: the Representamen, the Interpretant, and the Object, which for theoretical and pedagogical purposes may be dissociated, but which in practice form, or should form, an indecomposable whole” (Deledalle–Rhodes 1990b: 101). We are already familiar with these elements and their internal continuity and we have already seen in 2.2 above that the circle of Gérard Deledalle preferred the term ‘representamen’ to solve the terminological problems surrounding the term ‘sign’. The problems arise when these elements are described in motion: “The representamen is the sign prior to any interpretation. This sign is literally without an object for those who receive it. The interpretant is the sign which those who receive it propose as sign of the object of the representamen (Deledalle–Rhodes 1990a: 1). My first comment is positive: Deledalle–Rhodes draws brilliant consequences from the potentiality of the representamen, which is correctly presented as a sign in and by itself, regardless of any future reference and signification. The second remark is more problematic: the quotation attributes to the receiver the responsibility of establishing a link between object and interpretant. This clarifies the above quotations in which objects would come at the end of the semiotic sequence and would be ‘produced’ by interpretants. Deledalle–Rhodes quotes a French translation of CP 2.228 (a fragment from 1897) by her husband Gérard Deledalle to make her point; let me copy it below for convenience together with Peirce’s original:

Un signe, ou *representamen*, est quelque chose qui tient lieu pour quelqu’un de quelque chose sous quelque rapport ou quelque titre. Il s’adresse à quelqu’un, c’est-à-dire crée dans l’esprit de cette personne un signe équivalent ou peut-être un signe plus développé. Ce signe qu’il crée, je l’appelle l’*interprétant du premier signe*. CE SIGNE TIENT LIEU DE QUELQUE CHOSE : de son *objet* (Deledalle 1978: 121, cit. in Deledalle–Rhodes 1990a: 1).

A sign, or **representamen**, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the **interpretant** of the first sign. THE SIGN STANDS FOR SOMETHING, its **object**.

I have highlighted one phrase in each version in small caps. In Deledalle's translation, 'signe' seems to refer more to the interpretant than to the representamen ('*ce signe*'='this sign' should point to the grammatical subject of the previous sentence rather than to its object); and Deledalle-Rhodes glosses: "Cet objet correspondra plus ou moins au representamen *en fonction de son interprétant*" (Deledalle-Rhodes 1990a: 1. 'The degree of correspondence of the object to the representamen *depends on its interpretant*', my translation). So, there is no doubt: in Deledalle-Rhodes' understanding of Peirce's theory of signs, the object is the object of the interpretant, not of the representamen; in fact, it merely 'corresponds' to the latter. I believe this contradicts Peirce. Peirce's occurrence of the term 'sign' in the highlighted part of the original quote above unequivocally refers to the representamen, in fact it continues: "It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the **ground** OF THE REPRESENTAMEN (CP 2.228, 1897 my emphasis in small caps). Moreover, the next paragraph reads "In consequence of every representamen being thus connected with three things, the ground, THE OBJECT, and the interpretant, the science of semiotic has three branches (CP 2.229, 1897). Throughout his life, Peirce kept to the view that the representamen represents the object non-mediate (but from a certain viewpoint, of course) and the interpretant represents the object through the mediation of the representamen (eg, CP 8.177, 1903; 6.347, 1908; and 8.343, 1908). The Deledalles' understanding of sign-action updates Peirce and turns him almost into a pre-post-structuralist thinker. It is always tempting and often necessary to renovate Peirce's philosophical building; however, giving flesh-and-blood sign receivers the task of 'proposing' semiotic objects is not consistent with his design.

With these paragraphs I hope I am not breaking the promise I made at the start of chapter 2 that I would only include material which would be relevant to the typical translation scholar. If I did, I will make amends by drawing conclusions for this section that are quick and to the point. Deledalle–Rhodes draws lucid and important consequences from the insight that translation is semiotic in nature. Firstly, like Lawendowski before her, she saw that T–semiosis involves verbal as well as nonverbal signs (theme number 3). In fact, she maintains that if scholars limit their horizon to language, they would make their life difficult and miss the real point, which falls under theme number 4. This passage implies a deep redefinition of the notion of translation and points towards the author’s original contribution. Deledalle–Rhodes boldly states that the real problems of translation are semiotic (object, representamen, interpretant, etc.) and that when those are taken care of, the traditional problems (eg, language structures and units) are secondary. Finally, theme number 1 (equivalence) is also comprehensively redefined in the light of Peirce’s theory of the interpretant. All this could have been argued perfectly well without the post–structuralist–like understanding of Peirce’s sign–action, which I found totally misguided.

3.8 *Gorlée. A landmark in the semiotics of translation*

Dinda Liesbeth Gorlée penned the fourth and last false start of a semiotic theory of translation after Jakobson, Van Kesteren, and Toury. Her paper titled “Wittgenstein, Translation and Semiotics” (Gorlée 1989) appeared in the maiden issue of *Target*, which would become the journal of reference in translation studies. Unlike her three predecessors, however, Gorlée went on to write extensively on translation semiotics (cf. Gorlée 1986a, 1986b, 1989, 1992, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004a). A selection of her articles have been collected in two books (Gorlée 1994, 2004b) which I will review in the next two sub–sections.

3.8.1 *Semiotics and the Problem of Translation*

Semiotics and the Problem of Translation (Gorlée 1994), is a collection of texts written between 1985 and 1992 (cf. Id.: 28) and is the first book-length title entirely devoted to the nexus between Peirce's semiotics and translation theory. The book promised to be "a new departure, which should be an escape-route open to free translators from the dualistic prison in which they have long been confined" (Deledalle-Rhodes 1994: 53). One of its shortcomings, however, is that the material and arguments presented do not follow a clear principle of organisation, therefore it is not easy to find the book's main thesis. In spite of this, it seems to me *Semiotics and the Problem of Translation* rests on the following premise:

First, [...] we should consider seriously the logical implications of semiosis as a paradigm for (sign) translation (of which interlingual translation is only one ramification); second, [...] translation (in its manifold varieties, but concentrating of Jakobson's language-based distinction, with particular emphasis on interlingual translation) exemplifies in its turn semiosis (Gorlée 1994: 226–7).

This is a sensible strategy: Peirce's writings are almost unbearably abstract, whereas translation studies literature is traditionally biased towards praxis. A clever mix of the two may benefit both semioticians and translation scholars. Deledalle-Rhodes wrote an acute review of *Semiotics and the Problem of Translation* calling it "a landmark in the history of translation theory" (Deledalle-Rhodes 1994: 49). In her review Deledalle-Rhodes discusses the work's many shortcomings and lists its achievements. Let me highlight some of the latter. Gorlée shows that translation theory should steer away from an excessive focus on verbal language. Although she herself does not fully keep this promise, she convincingly argues that depicting translating exclusively as an operation carried out on language would be reductive. Her approach makes it easy to see that language is just one of the many semiotic systems people use to think and communicate: a theory of verbal signs presupposes a general theory of signs. Another contribution of *Semiotics and the Problem of Translation* involves Peirce's theory of the object. After giving a lucid account of dynamical and

immediate object (Gorlée 1994: 139–40), Gorlée draws an interesting distinction between two sorts of translatability: that which involves the immediate object, and that which involves the dynamical object. This line of argument is important for translation theory, because it opens a space for non-mechanical processes. As the author wrote commenting the three categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness “[o]ne of the extrapolations of this piece of Peirce’s doctrine of signs is that it liberates the linguistic sign, both original and translated, from the determination of pure Thirdness, and places it in the Heraclitean stream of semiosis” (Id.: 145).

The best analysis of *Semiotics and the Problem of Translation* I could find is in Cécile Cosculluela’s doctoral dissertation (Cosculluela 1996) and I would like to summarise her conclusions. Let me make one thing very clear before I do. The paragraphs you can find below are a *creative* and *synthetic* translation of some paragraphs in Cosculluela’s text. The method is unusual, but so is the experience of reading someone else’s assessment one can totally agree with. My creative translation tries to strike a balance between giving the French scholar her due and making her words my own.

In general, *Semiotics and the Problem of Translation* is very rewarding, in spite of its weak points such as the discussion of Jakobson’s three kinds of translation, which are forced into a semiotic framework. Interlingual, intralingual, and intersemiotic translation are made to correspond to Peirce’s thirdness, secondness, and firstness respectively. This move has another drawback: because genuine semiosis is associated only to thirdness, it follows that translation proper can never be genuine semiosis.

Translation is described as the very essence of semiosis, to the point that the two terms are presented as synonyms. Taking the cue from Wittgenstein’s language games, translating is likened to a game and, under a different angle, to an incomplete contract. Peirce’s writings are combed for references to translation. Gorlée shows a surprising tendency to resolve some of Peirce’s conceptions into dyadic terms; eg. when she proposes to add the interpreter as a fourth element of semiosis, or when she uses Peirce’s statements to show that a translator’s two roles (source-text receiver and target-text utterer) are in effect one.

These objections notwithstanding, this book is in many ways admirable. In particular, a number of Peircean notions are successfully employed to discuss translation: abduction, the theory of the interpretant, the three categories, fallibilism, pragmatism, unlimited semiosis, and translation's contribution to the search for truth. As to equivalence, it is defined as identity across codes; two signs are equivalent insofar as their dynamical objects are, or rather insofar as they determine an interpretant that refers to the same dynamical object. Three types of equivalence are also proposed: qualitative, referential, and signification.

Gorlée is above all a pioneer who helped show the relevance of semiotics for a theory of translation. The author proposes the name 'semiotranslation' for this approach; but a new label is not required for the emergence of this interdisciplinary (from Cosculluela 1996: VII, 3: 482 ff).

There are a few additional points of my own I would like to make. Like Cosculluela, I noticed an inconsistency in Gorlée's positions: Cosculluela describes it as a difficulty to keep her logic triadic, I would add that this difficulty shows most clearly in those passages where the author moves from the domain of semiotics to the domain of translation. I would therefore suggest that there is an asymmetry between Gorlée's familiarity with the discourses of semiotics and translation. Here is an example.

Chapter 4 of *Semiotics and the Problem of Translation* discusses game theory (Id.: 78), an approach to translation spearheaded by Jiří Levý (Levý 1967). Levý's preference for game theory has had a large influence on translation studies, sometimes without due regard to its limits due to the fact that game theory is an attempt to represent interpersonal and social behaviour by means of mathematical models. Gorlée seems to be aware of the risks involved and takes the parallel between games and translating with a pinch of salt:

In the game of translation, solutions for problems must often be other than grammar-generated and may be the result of non-systematic search in a certain direction. Rule-consistency in decision-making needs to coexist with free discovery if the game of translation is to yield optimal results (Id.: 79–80).

Her analysis of games leans towards philosophy, not mathematic modelling: Eco's model Q, Wittgenstein's language games, and Peirce's abductive moment in the process of habit formation. This allows her to make an important point: recapturing "the play element in translation that has been lost in the labyrinths of rationality" (Id.: 85). So far, so semiotically good. Now, let us compare these positions with the following quotation, still from the same chapter.

This first interpretative step made by the translator, the gaining of insight into the text's "inner world", is followed by, and alternative to, a second interpretative move which is outwardly focused. This creative, or reproductive, interpretation constitutes translation proper and consists of the actual transfer of the text from source language into target language. (Id.: 68).

I find it hard to reconcile the degree of sophistication of the semiotic argument with the 'decoding–transfer–encoding' view of translation implied here.

Another shortcoming is the way in which sometimes Peirce's theories are applied to translation. The claim that "Translating is semiosis" (Id.: 106) is followed by an account of the translation process that is patterned point by point after the inner workings of Peirce's sign. Because this applies to all sign–action, the account does not explain translating more than it explains—say—following a recipe to make *panna cotta*. The only bit that would apply specifically to translating is this: "the second interpretant–sign is produced with codes and language–games which are transformations of the original signs" (Ibid.). What transformations, the text does not tell.

Chapter 6 includes the outcome of a painstaking search for any reference to translation in Peirce published and unpublished manuscripts. From them, we can learn that Peirce used translation as a figure in a number of cases, including the core of semiosis, geometrical translation, and the representation of thought by means of the diagrammatical system he called existential graphs. The author concludes that Peirce shifted his viewpoint on translation twice in the course of his life. However, she fails to remark one simple fact: there is not enough evidence to conclude that Peirce considered translation in itself a topic worth of serious thought. We have already seen that

Deledalle–Rhodes stated this fact much more honestly and added that this was typical of his time: “until recent times the activity known as translation was not considered to be a discipline or a study in its own right” (Deledalle–Rhodes 1996: 668).

No self-respecting semiotic analysis of translation can afford to skip a discussion of equivalence. Peirce’s ideas about meaning are so original and exciting that a completely new theory of equivalence can be built on them (cf. Steconi 1994). Here is Gorlée’s best try: “By equivalence will be meant here the stipulation [...] that there be between source text and target text identity across codes” (Id.: 170). Cosculluela strongly attacks this definition: “In spite of her precautions, Gorlée ends up by establishing an analogy between *equivalence* and *identity* which proves her lack of rigour” (Cosculluela 1996: 459, my translation). One more time, I agree with the French scholar; I would only add that this is more evidence of a mismatch between semiotic and translational discourses in *Semiotics and the Problem of Translation*.

These objections notwithstanding, like Deledalle–Rhodes and Cosculluela before me, I believe that this is an admirable book. Let us have a look at a final quotation:

Indeed, the image of translation that emerges from a Peircean semiotics is one of change and growth, of expansion through transformation. [...] On this view, semiotranslation is a unidirectional, future-oriented, cumulative, and irreversible process, one which advances, in successive instances, towards higher rationality, complexity, coherence, clarity and determination, while progressively harmonizing chaotic, unorganized, and problematic translations (and elements and/or aspects of translations), as well as neutralizing dubious, misleading, and false ones (Id.: 231).

Describing translation semiosis as growth is a giant leap forward with respect to traditional characterisations, especially in terms of transfer.

3.8.2 *On Translating Signs*

Ten years later, Gorlée published a second book for Rodopi: *On Translating Signs* (Gorlée 2004b). Like her first book, this one was also a collection of previously appeared texts. The introduction reads: “Selected and fragmentary parts of the first two chapters have over time been published in a variety of languages” (Id.: 13). The main rationale of the book is described as follows.

My discussion thus far should have clarified three things: firstly, what semiotics is; secondly, that we ought to consider the logical, behavioural, and intuitive implications of Peirce’s semiosis as a suitable paradigm for the translation of all kinds, of which translation from one language into another is just one example; and thirdly, that translation (and interpretation) in turn exemplifies semiosis, thereby giving brand-new answers to perennial questions concerning translation and theories thereof (Ibid.).

As you can see, not much has changed since *Semiotics and the Problem of Translation*. The only significant addition is the claim that Gorlée’s discussion clarified ‘what semiotics is’. This is surprising because semiotics is many things to many people. *On Translating Signs* includes an introduction and three chapters. Each part has its own list of references. Inevitably, many entries are repeated (for instance, Gorlée 1994 appears four times) and the risk of getting lost is great. In effect, from an editorial point of view, *On Translating Signs* is three books, not one. My report will cover chapters 1 and 2, but not chapter 3 because the latter does not belong with scholarly discourse.

The general plan for *On Translating Signs* is stated as follows:

Two themes run throughout my notion of semiotranslation. First, we should consider seriously the logical implications of Peirce’s semiosis as a paradigm for (sign) translation, of which interlingual translation is only one ramification. Second, translation in turn exemplifies semiosis, translation being understood here in its manifold varieties, but especially focussing on Jakobson’s language-based distinction, with particular emphasis on interlingual translation (Id.: 122).

A new theoretical paradigm is exactly what translation studies needs; basic research is timely and welcome. This chapter argues that Peirce's semiotics fits the bill because semiotics is a good antidote against structuralist strictures. Structuralism is convincingly attacked from a Peircean-semiotic position: "The leading principle of structuralism—binarism—has acquired the character of a conventional rule. The rule of binary oppositions constitutes the rigidly fixed a priori which has been elevated to the status of universal rule" (Id.: 68). The proposed alternative is the three-way logic of semiotics, which does not invalidate but includes binary forms of reasoning. Unfortunately, translation is brought into this discussion almost incidentally. For instance, at p. 65 one can find this remark after a dense paragraph on meaning, interpretation and habit: "This suggestion for translation studies and its survival can be illustrated by Peirce's account from the "life" of one text-sign...". A long quotation from Peirce follows. Why the suggestion is important for 'translation studies and its survival' is not specified. In general, the semiotic points raised in the chapter are not argued but simply presented as if they were self-evident; and this confirms my earlier suggestion that Gorrée is far more at ease with interpretive semiotics than with translation studies.

Chapter 2 is closer to the concerns of translators and translation scholars and includes some good applied semiotics. One basic notion is that translating "should not be equated with rule-bound step-by-step behaviour; it is only determined to a point by the linguistic codes of the translated text" (Id.: 122). Translating involves the deductive application of known rules and—when these fall short or fail us—it involves the search for new rules by hypothetical reasoning (or abduction). Peirce called this exercise 'play of musement' (eg. CP 6.460, 1908). Introducing musement into the practice would help translators make their work more interesting and original. The author advises translators to keep the texts at a distance lest they become "unable to let their thoughts drift and freely associate or engage in some other "playful" occupation of the mind" (Gorrée 2004: 130). If they did, they would block "access to the kinds of synthetic solutions which are generated abductively" (Id.: 131). Admittedly, this tip will not revolutionise the profession, but its theoretical implications can be significant.

Another implication confirms the radically new model for translating that concluded Gorlée's first book: "the image of translation that emerges from a semiotic view is one of change and growth, of overall expansion through transformation" (Id.: 103). Indeed, semiotics would rule out extreme expectations of faithfulness and equivalence from any kind of sign-action, including the special kind we call translating. This is a logical consequence of Peirce's view on the general nature of signs: "In the sign relation, the sign is wholly determined by the object, while the interpretant (or translation) is determined by the sign only up to a point" (Id.: 123). This means that the correspondence between whatever a sign is about (its object) and whatever it is taken to signify (its interpretant) is neither fixed nor pre-determined, but it is always open to negotiation through the sign itself. This confirms another insight we had already met ten years earlier: a semiotic approach can easily account for the creative side of translating; a side that goes largely unrecognised in traditional decoding-recoding models.

On Translating Signs contains a wealth of information and reflections on the semiotics of C.S. Peirce; the material is scattered and unsystematic, but a patient reader can learn a lot. This does not apply when it comes to translation studies. The book paints an outdated and conservative picture for translating and translation. Take the units of translation, for example. The author seems to think mainly of words. Indeed, in her 'play of musement' the translator "submits [her]self unselfishly to the problem (which may be a word, word combination, sentence, paragraph, etc.), and dissolve [her] 'T' into it" (Id.: 130). The list is revealing. Another example is the ultimate and ideal goal the translator is aiming at. "[T]he translation will eventually achieve its point of fulfilment, at which time all information, explicit and implicit, conveyed by the source text is supposed to have re-materialized in the target text..." (Id.: 132). This quotation revives the old 'perfect translation' myth that has crippled many a translator and that—in my opinion—should have no currency in a semiotic model.

It should be clear now why I described Gorlée as 'one of the pioneers in the semiotics of translation'. If I were to pick just one innovative insight in her prolific production that spanned

about 18 years, I would undoubtedly go for the suggestion that closed her 1994 book: T-semiosis is not so much about transfer but growth. This apparently innocent swap of metaphors has potentially huge implications. I will use it several times in the rest of this study to identify and delimit what is specific to T-semiosis (theme 8. See 4.4.2, 5.3, 5.6.1, 6.3 and 7.2 below).

3.9 Cosculluela. A general triadic model

In 2003 the French scholar Cécile Cosculluela summarised chapters VIII and IX of her doctoral dissertation on the semiotics of translation (Cosculluela 1996) in an article for *Semiotica* (Cosculluela 2003). The article states its intentions as follows: i) to document translation studies evolution from secondness to thirdness; and ii) to bring an original contribution that would help build and interdisciplinary convergence between Peircean semiotics and translation studies.

The first point is restated as tracing the progress “from dualistic to dialectical conceptions” of translation (Cosculluela 2003: 105). Dualistic oppositions abound in the literature; familiar pairs include: word v sense, literal v free, content v style, and source v target. Cosculluela remarks that what counts in these pairs is not so much the terms that are in opposition but the very idea of trade-off, the either/or logic that each pair implies. “In each case, either one of these two extremes is favoured at the expense of the other” (Id.: 106). In contrast, dialectical approaches are traced back to Amyot, Luther and Dolet, who regarded the terms in the pairs as complementary rather than opposed. As is known, John Dryden even included a third term in his account of translation: ‘paraphrase’ as a middle position between ‘metaphrase’ and ‘imitation’. Moving on to our time, the author surveys the passage from secondness to thirdness and, next, from linguistics to semiotics through a stage she calls “some form of semiotics” (Id.: 113). Why the sarcasm? As this chapters testifies, several authors have attempted semiotic accounts of translation. However, Cosculluela laments the many cases in which the term ‘semiotics’ has been used to refer to structuralist semiology or—worse—to a mix of the two rather than to Peirce’s philosophy. We have excluded them from these pages, but there are quite a few of them. Cosculluela finds that in some cases

semiotics is simply used as a synonym for ‘nonverbal’. Recalling that the line that runs between interpretive and structuralist semiotics corresponds to the distinction between triadicity and dyadicity, the authors who have written at the intersection of semiotics and translation theory can be classified in three broad groups: those who tried to “draw upon Peirce’s semiotics in a somewhat arguable manner” (Ibid.), those who have been inspired by structuralist semioticians—notably Algirdas Greimas—and finally those who are utterly confused. In this latter category, Hatim and Mason (1990) stand out: “They quite simply postulate that Peirce’s and Saussure’s sign theories are the same, and they mix concepts that belong to different philosophies” (Id.: 115–6). I would endorse this judgement without reservations. However, this principle of classification leads to a fairly Draconian result: the group of researchers who, according to Cosculluela, managed to correctly apply interpretive semiotics to translation studies is reduced to just two: Janice Deledalle–Rhodes and Dinda Gorlée (but cf. the many critical remarks about the latter in Cosculluela 1996).

Cosculluela, after Deledalle–Rhodes, believes that the real problems of translation are not where our research tradition would locate them. Translators deal first and foremost with signs, regardless of them being verbal or not. Making sense of verbal signs presupposes making sense of signs in general. Besides: no sign in use can be purely verbal or purely nonverbal; all semiosis is to some extent syncretic. “[I]t seems reasonable to assume that most of the signs we commonly use consist in a fair balance between verbality and nonverbality” (Id.: 114). This is where Cosculluela begins to keep the second promise she made at the outset: helping Peircean semiotics and translation studies converge into an interdiscipline. Her first application to translation theory is as simple as it is clever. Translation can be observed from three viewpoints corresponding to Peirce’s categories. The point of view of firstness is “the vague idea of passage, the qualitative possibility of translation” (Id.: 109); secondness embraces all the traditional oppositions we have seen earlier; and, finally, “from the point of view of thirdness, translation [...] appears as the relation between word and meaning” (Ibid.). These three points will structure the rest of her paper.

The argument uses the singularly lucid model of communication Peirce adopted in MS 318 of 1907 (now included in Peirce 1992–1998, selection 28: 398–433), which describes signs as whatever intends to mediate between utterers and interpreters. In that context, translation is described as a “medium between one sign and another” (Cosculluela 2003: 120–1) and the firstness of translation is “the qualitative possibility of mediation” (Ibid.), which is consistent with the characteristic vagueness of firstness. Secondness is “mainly under the form of the translations [the researcher] made” (Ibid.). As to thirdness, it is described as follows: “remarks or rules that, as laws, belong to thirdness, but naturally are founded on firstness and bear consequences in the realm of secondness” (Id.: 133–4 n. 25). This characterisation is important for us for two reasons: first, because it reaffirms the internal continuity of translation semiosis; second, because it corresponds almost perfectly to the outer layer of my model for T-semiosis. The model—which I present in chapter 4—pulls together in a genuine triad the possibility of translation (which I call Foundation and analyse further), translation events (I use the same term as Cosculluela), and its law-like rules (norms). In spite of this broad overlap between Cosculluela’s arguments and my own, I can see one area of clear disagreement. Let’s have a look at these statements: “This idea of translation from one sign into another and so on *ad infinitum* encompasses the different meanings that the term *translation* can cover” (Id.: 121) and “Translation is definitely at the core of semiotics” (Ibid.). These arguments are potentially problematic if one wants to look for what is *distinctive* of translation semiosis; ‘translation’ can certainly be used as a synecdoche for all semiosis, but this hardly helps make better sense of translation semiosis. I believe one should decide whether one wants to use translation to explain semiosis or, rather, semiosis to explain translation (see 4.2). Of course, it is possible that translation and semiotics help explain each other—as Gorrée suggests—however, the two directions should be kept distinct at all times, as—I believe—Cosculluela fails to do.

In the next move, the “analogy between the concepts of sign and translation” (Id.: 122) inspires the French author to develop a core descriptive model of translation. It can be expressed as a

proportion: a translation is to its original as an interpretant is to its representamen (see Figure 5 at Id.: 123). Cosculluela explains this relation discussing the saw ‘Evil communications corrupt good manners’ in English and Greek, an example Peirce uses at CP 5.138 of 1903. She asks whether the two expressions in the different languages “are two representamens (or even a single one) standing for the same object, or a source representamen and a target representamen. But given that the interpretant can be defined as a representamen determined by another representamen, it invalidates the question” (Cosculluela 2003: 124). I believe this is not the case. Two expressions in different languages that are regarded as standing for the same object are not necessarily evidence of translation. A Greek and an English speaker may utter the sentences unawares of each other. So, it is true that “Two propositions are equivalent when either might have been the interpretant of the other” (CP 5.569, 1901–2; cited in Cosculluela 2003: 124); however, this equivalence may be accidental and not the result of T-semiosis. In this light, the question remains very much valid whether two utterances are two distinct representamens or one is the interpretant of the other. Cosculluela herself is aware that the point is crucial, but her solution is unsatisfactory. She writes that the two expressions of ‘Evil communications corrupt good manners’ in English and Greek “are two representamens with respect to the object they represent. But considering one relatively to the other, they are in a representamen-to-interpretant relationship” (Ibid.). These two positions correspond in fact to the accidental utterance of ‘equivalent’ sentences and to T-semiosis, respectively. In T-semiosis, the Greek utterance is an interpretant and the one in English is the mediating sign or representamen. They may still refer to the same object, but the Greek translation refers to it thanks to the mediation of the English original (see 6.7 below for a discussion).

The next section in Cosculluela’s paper proposes an analysis of translation in terms of the nine elements of Peirce’s classification of signs of 1903 along the lines of van Kesteren’s 1978 paper (see 3.3.3 above) which—however—is not cited. The main difference is that Cosculluela focuses on the product of T-semiosis whereas van Kesteren compared source and target texts. The French scholar uses her three categorial viewpoints described above to reach an interesting conclusion:

- looking at a target text in itself one investigates the nature of translation;
- looking at the relation between the translated text and its object—described as ‘existential reality’ regardless of source or target side—“is a way of approaching the technical processes of transition from one sign to another” (Id.: 126); finally,
- looking at the relation between the translated sign and its interpretant contributes to “establishing the basis of a theory of translation” (Ibid.), and this is a viewpoint Cosculluela describes as the ‘pragmaticist design of translation’.

I like this insight, above all because it weaves a triadic discourse and wraps it around translation semiosis in very general terms. It also makes room for something like ‘the nature of translation’, which is one of the assumptions that run deepest in my present work. In fact, I believe Cosculluela has an organic theory of translation which is broader and firmer than she herself claims. The theory her three-way division implies is not limited to the ‘pragmaticist design of translation’, but covers her entire triad: nature, technical processes, and pragmaticist design. Having established her theoretical framework, Cosculluela discusses her three viewpoints on translation in detail.

She first offers a phenomenological description of a typical translation process.

The translator’s task includes the cooperation of three successive parts to be played, namely that of

- (1) the Interpreter, who is acquainted with the source interpretant (of the source sign),
- (2) the Muser, who reconstructs the meaning of the object (common to SS and TS), and
- (3) the Graphist, who inscribes the target representamen (of the target sign) (Id.: 127).

Muser, Graphist and Interpreter are Peircean terms found in a part of his philosophical architecture known as existential graphs which I did not cover in Chapter 2 (cf. CP vol. 4, bk. II). Obviously, this account will stand or fall on the issue of the object. The author says that her model “highlights

the approximative [sic] identity of the common object” (Id.: 128); she also adds that “a target interpretant [...] has an object equivalent to that of a given source representamen” (Ibid.). So, the object(s) of source and target signs are described first as identical then as equivalent. This is confusing, because, at least in the classical view, identity is an “equivalence relation which everything has to itself and to nothing else” (Noonan Winter 2004). Therefore, do source and target texts share one (identical) object or do they have two equivalent ones? You will see that this is a restatement of the problem I highlighted earlier. If target and source signs are two representamens, both will refer to the object in the same way; if, alternatively, they are one the interpretant of the other, the source sign will refer to the object by virtue of its ground and the target sign mediately through the source sign.

The second viewpoint, which is about technical processes, builds upon this reconstruction. Cosculluela rightly claims that “depending on the type of relationship to existential reality that he wants to re–create” the translator “may opt for an iconic, indexical, or symbolic translation” (Id.: 128). The examples given for the three options include:

- iconic: Vinay and Darbelnet’s (Vinay and Darbelnet 1958) “borrowing, calques, and literal translation” (Cosculluela 2003: 128);
- indexical: change of “grammatical categories or points of view” (Id.: 129), Vinay and Darbelnet’s ‘transposition and modulation’;
- symbolic: “translating American baseball or English cricket by the French cyclisme is a symbolic translation, because what is important here is not the usual meaning of these terms but their symbolic value (popular sport)” (Ibid.). This corresponds to Vinay and Darbelnet’s ‘equivalence and adaptation’.

The discussion of the third viewpoint hinges on this passage, which is also as close to a definition of translation as Cosculluela goes:

translation can be described as the work on signs that the translator accomplishes by becoming Interpreter, Muser, and Graphist in turn, that is to say by investing himself in the evolutionary logic of Peircean semiotics according to which the interpretant in the source sign (SS) is engendered by the original object reconstructed in the in-between sign (IS) with which another representamen in the target sign (TS) can have the same relationship R—O as the original representamen for another interpretant, etc. (Id.: 130).

I am not sure this account is fully compatible with the first and second viewpoints—at least not with my understanding of them. Apart from a Peirce-like obscurity of language, I don't seem to be able to fit the new and unannounced 'in-between sign' in the existing picture. If a target sign is properly the interpretant of the original, there should be no room for it. The in-between sign undermines the model of translation proposed so far by the author which was based on the three internal components of the sign. The difficulty would be overcome if the model adopted were that of two text-signs that follow one another along the chain of semiosis. The feeling of uncertainty is reinforced by the 'pragmaticist design' which grounds translation theory "integrating a *monadic* approach centred on the *interpretant*, a *dyadic* approach transiting from a *representamen* to another (or from a representamen to an interpretant), and a *triadic* approach based on the evolutionary requirements of the logical continuity of semiotics..." (Ibid.). Again, the uncertainty between the 'two representamens' and the 'representamen to interpretant' view of translation recurs. In the passages quoted above, it boils down to the conjunction 'or' in the fragment 'representamen to another (*or* from a representamen to an interpretant)'. Latin may help: is it *aut* or *vel*? It should be *aut*, because representamen and interpretant are categorially distinct; but I fear Cosculluela really meant *vel*, and this is the core of my disagreement.

To conclude, Cosculluela covers many of the themes I listed at the beginning of this chapter: equivalence, nonverbal signs, 'why is translating difficult?', issues of method, and 'from dyadic to triadic discourse' (themes numbers 1 and 3–6, if you like to keep track). In fact, her treatment of translation semiosis has the broadest scope I have found so far, because she shows a good and balanced knowledge of both semiotics and translation studies. Her insistence on the necessity to

shift from dyadic to triadic discourse (theme number 6) is particularly important. Cosculluela's contribution is also noteworthy under theme number 8 mainly because of: i) her description of translation in terms of a triad which includes possibility, events, and rules; and ii) the 'qualitative possibility of mediation'. Both will be central components of the integrated model of translation I will present in chapter 4. More specifically, the latter presents mediation as a 'first quality'. I regard this conception—no matter how esoteric it may look outside Peircean circles—as the pillar for any argument on translation's specificity (see 4.3.3 below). Cosculluela's basic arguments have great potential. In spite of their shortcomings, they do “contribute to check the traditional tendency to (re)produce dual oppositions, and to found translation studies on the homogeneous basis of triadic semiotics” (Cosculluela 2003: 132).

3.10 Torop. *The man who has read all the books*

According to the criteria I am using in this review, Peeter Torop—like Toury before him—should not be included in my list because his semiotics of translation merely acknowledges Peircean semiotics without using it explicitly. However, his contribution is so important for *any* semiotics of translation that it would not make sense to leave him out on purely doctrinarian grounds. In 1993 Torop—a native Estonian—succeeded Lotman as the head of Tartu's Department of Semiotics. He is also the co-editor of *Sign Systems Studies*—the journal Lotman founded in 1964—which includes an occasional section titled 'Semiotics of translation'. Torop has explored a wide range of issues in literature, music, film, and theatre, but his main interest is in translation as witnessed by his many publications (cf. Torop 1998, 2000a, 2000c, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Torop and Kull 2000) to quote only recent titles in English). His main work so far is (Torop 2000b), first appeared in Russian in 1995 with the title *Total'nyj perevod*. One awesome feature of this 449-page-long book are its 670 notes to a veritable crowd of authors. It seems Professor Torop has read all the books. At present, *Total'nyj perevod* is available in Russian and Italian only, but it certainly deserves a wider audience. Torop's views on translation have evolved since 1995. I will review two articles: (Torop

2002) on his general plan, and (Torop 2000c) which includes more specific views on translation.

The former paper moves from this assumption:

Although there are several disciplines engaged in the study of culture, we can speak of neither a methodologically unified research into culture, nor of a general theory of culture. As an object of study culture allows for too many different definitions for this to be possible. In translation studies the possibilities of defining the object of study are much more limited, but the problem of unified methodology is bound to arise even here (Id: 594).

Combining the study of culture and the study of translation is an obvious strategy for the successor of Yuri Lotman, the Russian scholar regarded as one of the leading contemporary semioticians. Let me give you just one short sample of what he thought of semiotic differences: “all human dialogue becomes a conversation in several languages. These are only partially adequate to each other and such structure implies huge difficulties. At the same time, only this ensures that which constitutes the basis of human communication” (Lotman 1994: 29, my translation; cf. also Lotman 1985, esp. 111–145). Torop—always the paragon of scholarship—obviously acknowledges his debt to Lotman. He informs us that the Russian semiotician saw the semiosphere as the place of a dialectical tension between: i) the difference introduced by the many, heterogeneous, more or less autonomous languages and discourses that make up a culture; and ii) the similarity introduced by “the integration of languages of culture” (Torop 2002: 601), brought about by “metadescriptions and autometadescriptions (or culture’s attempt to make itself conscious through criticism, theory, the media, etc.) and, secondly, by creolisation [...]” (Ibid.). The ultimate goal of Torop’s research agenda is expressed just as adamantly: “Translation and translating are concepts concurrent with an active culture and allow us in the situation of the scarcity of culture theoretic means to approach the essence of cultural mechanisms in a way that the analysis of both translation and translating as well as culture are enriched” (Id.: 603). Let me rewrite this in syllogistic form: i) Torop wants to understand culture but the means to describe it are too weak; ii) translation is essentially like culture

and can be described much more easily; iii) analysis located at the border between cultural and translation studies will help us understand both culture and translation.

Torop 2000c discusses some of his views on translation proper. The author convincingly argues that “[d]emarkating [the] object of research” (Id.: 599) is the first step towards establishing the semiotics of translation as a discipline—which also defines the scope and objective of my own research agenda. Here, he makes a crucial metatheoretical point. “The object of translation studies is formed by the process of translation, while semiotics has focused on signs and sign systems—making the system and the process congruent has always been difficult” (Ibid.). To understand this difficulty in full, let me repeat that the intellectual tradition to which Torop belongs typically describes signs as object-like entities and sign systems as static, dyadic structures. The interpretive tradition launched by Peirce, instead, stresses the processual aspect in signs and their systems. For interpretative semiotics, signs are primarily events (semioses) and sign systems are dynamic, triadic and evolving. Torop’s congruence problem would become a bit less intractable if he had chosen a Peircean outlook. Specifically, the point of the exercise would become a search for the congruence between two events: semiosis and translation semiosis. I am exploiting this wider congruence in the present study, which looks for the logico-semiotic conditions to translation semiosis in general. At this level of abstraction—as close as possible to firstness, in Peircean terms—there is continuity between the two domains.

This approach gives a whole new meaning to the following remark: “In translation studies the question about the *limits of translation* depends largely on the treatment of the problem of translatability” (Ibid.). Translatability is the vague and potential first of all translation semiosis; a characterisation of translatability is precisely what allows us to draw an edge in the semiosphere around translation semiosis. This edge can help answer “[t]he starting question to define translation” which is “the question about the border between translation and non-translation” (Torop 2000c: 599). Torop is right to imply that this border cannot be described in terms of first qualities only. Like any cultural entity, translation semiosis is actualised in existent particulars

(individual translation processes, texts, and relations) and responds to general, law-like concepts (norms). “In any case we can maintain that a translation text shapes its ontology through its relations with the original and the recipient culture” (Id.: 601). This is another contribution a Peircean approach can give to Torop’s quest: there is continuity between the three categorial entities: translation conditions, events and norms. They are held together like any ordinary Peircean triad (see 4.3 below).

These abstract considerations can be put to the test in practice. For instance, Torop writes:

From the viewpoint of translational activity and its theoretical interpretation it is important to demarcate the ontology and interpretation of texts. The reader is free in his reading. Although the translator is also a reader, he does not have that freedom due to the need to determine the rate of translatability (his attitude to language, discourse, text, and intertextual space) according to the goal of translation and to work out the strategy of translation. Making boundaries explicit eases both the work of the translator and the reader’s reception (Id.: 605).

If this is true—and I believe it is—then the next question is: Who determines the parameters of translatability, the goal, and the strategy? In many cases, translators are told by others what to do, how, how fast, and—if they are lucky—why. An example of this ‘chain of command’ is the highly regulated work environments of staff translators and interpreters in international and supranational organisations such as the Directorate General for Translation at the European Commission in Luxembourg and Brussels (see Hermans and Stecconi 2002; Stecconi 2001). In highly structured and hierarchical work environments a good understanding of boundaries gives translators the intellectual means to adopt what I call the ‘strategy of the salmon’. Translators sometimes have precisely the knowledge and skills needed to ensure successful multicultural communication; why confine them to the last stages of the process of text production when all the decisions have already been taken? I believe it is the duty of translators to ‘swim upstream’ along the chain of command in their organisations, make their voices heard and contribute their full potential. In this respect, ‘making boundaries explicit’ is above all an empowering exercise.

Torop's perhaps most original insight is his characterisation of the 'semiospheric boundary' derived from Lotman's conception of semiosphere (Torop 2000c: 605). Rather than describing it only as a limiting condition or constraint, Torop writes: "The boundary has an extremely important role in the semiosphere, because as a bilingual mechanism it translates external messages into the internal language of the semiosphere, discriminates one's own from the alien, it turns external non-messages into messages" (Ibid.). This position complements my earlier remark on Jakobson (see 3.2 above): if Jakobson implied that ordinary language use presupposes the translatability of the linguistic sign, Torop adds that a boundary is both a condition for translation to occur and a constitutive feature of the semiosphere. This has interesting practical effects as well: "When culture loses its boundaries, then it is the duty of the translator to protect them" (Id.: 602). I cannot agree more with the closing remarks of this illuminating article:

The rise of translation semiotics is caused by general changes in social textual communication and the formation of new objects of analysis. Moreover, traditional translation studies also need innovative propulsion and the problematic of translation semiotics has already found its firm position. Thus the disciplinary self-determination of the semiotics of translation is only a question of time (Id.: 607).

My closing statement on Torop will be shorter than usual, because I have already noted his most original and outstanding contributions. I will only relate them to the list of themes that structures the present chapter: themes number 2, 5, and 8 corresponding to borders, methodology, and translation's specificity respectively.

3.11 Petrilli. *The state of play*

Susan Petrilli is an extremely prolific Australian-born semiotician and translator based at the University of Bari, Italy. Her major recent contribution to the emerging interdisciplinary of the semiotics of translation is *Translation Translation* (Petrilli 2003c), which contains a selection of articles already published in three special issues of the journal *Athanor* she had edited between 1999

and 2001 (Petrilli 1999/2000b, 2000b, 2001). It would be impossible to go through her long list of publications here (cf. <http://www.susanpetrilli.com/pubblicazioni.htm>). I hope two of her texts included in *Translation Translation* will do her justice.

3.11.1 “Translation and Semiosis”

“Translation and Semiosis” (Petrilli 2003b) results from the merger of two articles already appeared in Italian (Petrilli 1999/2000a, 2000a). The latter makes some potentially important points, but it does so in a surprising manner. I will sketch a couple for you. Petrilli claims (after Sebeok and Lotman) that language has two recognised functions: it is i) a modelling system that allows us to interact with the world and make sense of it; and ii) it is a communication system that allows us to interact with each other. Modelling belongs with the evolution of the species and communication belongs with the evolution of the individual. So far, so good. Then we read that the relations among signs are developed in these two semiotic modes “Therefore we may speak of *translation*” (Id.: 32). Why? Let me give you another example. Biology distinguishes between prokaryotes and eukaryotes; “Therefore, it can also distinguish between prototranslation and eutranslation” (Ibid.). I found these instances of ‘therefore’ too dense to make sense. Each would take dozens of pages to justify and that would be an interesting study in its own right. The rest of this short text—which, I repeat, is only the second part of “Translation and Semiosis”—is just as obscure if not outright puzzling, such as the unconvincing claim that “The relation among signs is not continuous, but rather it is discontinuous” (Id.: 33) in open defiance of the continuity of sign–action. I will conclude my comments here and drop this text altogether.

The other article included in “Translation and Semiosis” opens and closes with a potential dilemma. The opening reads: “In the first place to translate is to interpret. [... T]ranslation is constitutive of the sign, indeed sign activity or *semiosis* is a translative process” (Petrilli 2003c: 17). The close states that “As the general “interpretability” of a text—with respect to which “translatability” is a special case—translatability also indicates that the translation of a text remains

open...” (Id.: 31). The first quotation establishes the identity of translation and sign–action, which is the interpretation of signs by means of other signs. The second quotation implies that translation is a *species* of the *genus* interpretation. Are we looking at a contradiction? In which sense is semiosis a translatable process? Can semiosis be equated with interpretation? If it can’t, how can one trace the space for translation within the larger field of interpretation? According to which criteria? The article tackles many of these questions in a lucid and singularly practical discussion (which reflects Petrilli’s rich experience as translator) starting with the interdependence between semiosis in general and translation. Petrilli extends Jakobson’s three kinds of translation much beyond verbal language and she does so in two steps. First, she puts forward a bold classification of all possible semiotic systems in the ‘biosemiosphere’, which covers all living creatures. Then she distinguishes between intersemiotic and endosemiotic translation—very much like Toury’s intersemiotic and intrasemiotic distinction (Toury 1986: 1114, see 3.4 above). The point is that these two kinds of translation “occur in the living world in general, and not only in the human cultural world” (Petrilli 2003: 19). This is a fascinating idea, but I would like to restate the danger of stretching the term and conception of translation too thin.

The second section includes a brilliant insight: “translation is *indirect discourse masked as direct discourse*” (Id.: 22, cf. also Eco 2003a: 20n. Please note that what the author calls ‘direct and indirect discourse’ is more often phrased as ‘quoted and reported speech’). The tension between these two types of speech is discussed in terms of narrative voices—that of the author of the original and that of the translator: “on the one hand, we have interpretative discourse, on the other, translator discourse simply understood as ostensive discourse. In reality, to translate is inevitably to interpret, and the translator is another one of the many masks that the author of a text may wear” (Petrilli 2003: 21). This state of affairs is also described as a case of exotopy (cf. Id.: 30–1), which is a general feature of fiction whereby, for instance, the pronoun ‘I’ identifies the character and not the historical author, or at least it does so only indirectly. Petrilli does not resolve the problem of the degree of autonomy of the translator’s voice in clear-cut terms, she prefers to frame it as “dialogic

otherness relationship” (Id.: 27). This is just as well, because the unity of the notion of translation does not lie on this level but on the simple recognition that two authorial figures co-exist in the translated text. Each translation event will take care to specify their relation. This relation may take an indefinite number of shapes which would have only a few things in common, such as ‘the power of attorney’ that the translator receives (or takes) and thanks to which her text will represent the original like a lawyer his client (see 4.4.3 below).

Next is a discussion of the kind of relation a target text entertains with the source in terms of Peirce’s famous distinction: symbol, index, and icon (see 2.10 above, cf. also Stecconi 2000). Petrilli refers it to “the relation between “sign” and “interpretant”” (Id.: 23) whereas in fact Peirce used this triad to describe the relation between signs and their objects, but this is not essential in the present context. The author reminds us that the terms of this triad—like those of all triads—are not exclusive; “no one of these three types of relations [...] subsists without the other two” (Id.: 24). Let us therefore see how the three modes of representation co-operate in translation. The target text represents the source text as an index insofar as it is parasitic, but this aspect should not be overstated, because “the translation-text is not connected to the original by a relation of necessity, of cause and effect” (Ibid.). The target text represents the source text as a symbol as well, but only in part because there is not one stable convention that prescribes how any given text should be translated into a given semiotic system. “[T]he translation-text must attempt a relation of answering comprehension with respect to the original” (Ibid.). The sense of the original is “determined and decided” (Ibid.) in the process of translation, which—consequently—finds and establishes its own rule as it occurs, and this reinforces its indexical character. The relation between source and target texts is best explained in iconic terms. By ‘icon’ Petrilli means “that sign most characterised by the tendency not to depend on a causal relation nor on a conventional relation [...] but by the relation of resemblance” (Id.: 25). This is another argument that contributes to a unitary conception of translation, which is logically and semiotically conceivable only if reference is made to similarity, whatever historical form this character may take (see 4.4.1 below).

The final issue taken up by this essay is translatability. The scope of this discussion is narrowly limited to verbal signs, but its basis is highly original. Petrilli maintains that it is irrelevant to ask whether there are elements and features in natural languages that correspond to each other; they don't because they are defined by their limits. "The correct question does not concern communication but *expressibility* [...]: can what is said in one historical–natural language be expressed in another?" (Id.: 28). The answer is yes and the question of translatability becomes redundant. Petrilli shows that our semiotic systems are already used to doing some of the things required by interlingual translation. For instance, all natural languages are metalinguistic systems; ie, they can represent themselves. If a language can talk about its own words, talking about the words of a different language will actually be easier. Another case in point is reported speech, which—as we saw—is a hallmark of translation. All languages provide the semiotic means to allow a speaker to report the words of another speaker. In this respect, "translation resorts to a practice all historical–natural languages are trained in" (Id.: 29).

3.11.2 "The intersemiotic character"

"The intersemiotic character of translation" (Petrilli 2003a) has a simpler and more focussed structure: it aims to throw light on the space between the observable ends of translation semiosis in order to identify the really interesting issues in translation. Petrilli argues that translation and interpreting are "processes [which] occur in the verbal sign system" (Id.: 41); however, semiosis can give rise to signs of any nature or system. In particular, a verbal sign—say, a line of poetry—can be ultimately realised by a moment of sadness, a gesture, or a doctoral dissertation (on this notion, see Short's comment at 3.12 below). So, the fact that in translation semiosis verbal signs on the source side can only become more verbal signs on the target side is a constraint: "to translate from one historical–natural language to another means to apply artificial limits, as it were, on the process" (Id.: 42). However, the verbal limit only applies to the end goal, because the process includes both verbal and nonverbal signs. Why does Petrilli raise this point? Because she does not

believe we should blame the *resistance of* verbal language for a difficult translation, as we often do; rather, the *limitation to* verbal language, which is semiotic in nature.

Another semiotic difficulty is based on a distinction we have seen in her other article reviewed above: the distinction between ‘interpretative and obstensive discourse’. The notion now becomes a lot more sophisticated because reference is made to the interpretant. The new distinction thus becomes: “interpretant of answering comprehension” and “interpretant of identification” (Id.: 43). While in the previous essay the question had been left more or less open, here Petrilli writes that “In the case of interlingual translation [... the] interpretant must limit itself to *identifying* the interpreted sign from the source language, to carrying out the task of *identification interpretant*” (Ibid.). I am not sure this is the case—always, typically or ever. This is another instance in which I would like to see Petrilli discuss her points more at length. To the extent that it is, however, it constitutes another semiotic constraint that would make translation semiosis difficult, because other forms of semiosis normally imply both kinds of interpretant.

This paper also raises a recurrent question for translation scholars: what do we translate: sign systems or utterances? Petrilli, using Bakhtin, clarifies the matter as follows:

Therefore, if an utterance repeated as an utterance *in the same historical–natural language* is no longer the same utterance, it will be even less so in a different historical–natural language.

Consequently, Bakhtin is right when he says that translatability among different historical–natural languages is possible because there is “a potential single language of languages”; but the text “can never be completely translated” because “there is no potential single text of texts” (Id.: 44).

I do not think that this semiotic difficulty is of the same nature as the ones pointed out before, nor that it is a difficulty typical of translation semiosis. A translation always claims to speak on behalf of the original; at the same time, it is always a new text in the target environment. Perhaps the

difficulty lies in the fact that often translators are not *expected* to make a new statement, as a consequence they are implicitly asked to square a circle (see chapter 6).

Finally, Petrilli proposes a distinction between *act* and *action*. The terms may not be felicitous, but the argument is interesting. Communication events are “made possible thanks to communication conditions that were established previously” (Id.: 45). She takes the example of a love declaration: it occurs only when the parties are already in love. So, ‘action’ concerns the acting subject; it is intentional and deliberate; in contrast, “the act is what has already occurred before action thus understood” (Id.: 46–7). Of course, this is very close to the basic tenets of speech–act theory. What makes them relevant for us is that the translating agent has a much larger control on the meaning of her action rather than on the significance and value of the act that frames it. “The real difficulty [in translation] concerns the fact of having to understand the communication that renders a text possible, that renders it significant as a response” (Id.: 49). This problem is linked to the limited repeatability of textual utterances. The ‘act’ that framed the original ‘action’ may not exist at all in the target environment. More generally, the original text’s sense and value depended on the relation between the text itself and its conditions of utterance. There is no guarantee that this relation may be replicated in the target environment.

Like Deledalle–Rhodes and Cosculluela before her, Petrilli is forcing us to rethink the reasons why translating can sometimes be so difficult (theme number 4). Difficulty in translation is like the hare, which—in proverbs of central Italy—always hides where you don’t expect. In a sense, the Australian scholar is spelling out the suggestions Deledalle–Rhodes put forward almost 15 years earlier. I believe this is her main contribution to translation semiotics, together with two conclusions that help us set T–semiosis apart from other forms of semiosis (theme number 8): the iconic relation between target and source texts and her elegant expression of translation as ‘quoted speech disguised as reported speech’.

3.12 T.L. Short. *Semiosis is not unlimited*

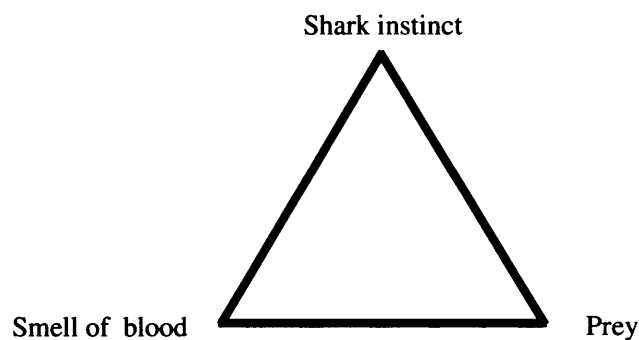
It is a sign of the times that the vast majority of the authors reviewed in this chapter show a fascination with unlimited semiosis. This is a popular notion, but not one that Peirce would endorse. I would like to illustrate this crucial point following the arguments of a leading semioticians—T.L. Short. According to Short, the notion of unlimited semiosis is based on what he calls “‘translation theory’ of meaning” (Short 2003: 219). It is true that for many years Peirce maintained this position. For instance, he wrote that “the meaning of a sign is the sign it has to be translated into” (CP 4.6, c.1906 also quoted in Short 2003: 219). In a series of papers spanning several years (eg, Short 1981, 1986, 2004) T.L. Short has developed a convincing argument to the effect that Peirce changed his mind in 1907, when he was 68 and only six years before his death. “In the end, Peirce’s translation theory of meaning does not entail that signs must always be translated into other signs, and so on, semeiosis without end” (Short 2003: 230). This paper presents at the outset the familiar view that translating implies the transfer of meaning from one system of signs to another. Short calls it a ‘meaning theory of translation’. The circularity of this notion with the translation theory of meaning should be immediately clear. Rather than surrendering to the mesmerising effect of an infinite fugue of representations, Short reacts as follows: “Clearly, Peirce could not have meant that the meaning of a sign *is* a sign” (Id.: 219). So, what could he have meant? The paper looks for an answer in the theory of the interpretant, which includes a promising claim: “Peirce coined the word “interpretant” to designate that in which or by which a sign acquires an interpretation. The same interpretation might be made in or by different interpretants” (Short 2003: 222). This is crucial for a non-circular conception of meaning and translation. There is a difference between the individual interpretants of a sign—including translations—and its general interpretation or meaning. “An interpretation [...] is a type or class of interpretants” (Ibid.). Likewise, a given sign is a particular relative to its meaning, which is general. However, interpretants are the only entities that can manifest an interpretation and signs are the only entities that can manifest meaning: “meaning does not exist apart from the things that have meaning” (Short 2003: 221).

Peirce's early semiotics assumed a continuum of signs that ran one after another and made asymptotically clearer reference to their object. In this model, significance would at best be identified with the process of sign-production itself. Both reference and significance would be external to the sign system, which would be self-contained. Short points out that one of the problems of this state of affairs is that it provides no way to tell a good translation from a bad one or from a mistranslation. Again, he asks: "But does it make any sense?" (Short 2003: 224). Here Short departs from Peirce's typical style of reasoning, which was that of a logician. He claims that interpretation presupposes an agent "capable of acting for a purpose" (Ibid.), albeit not necessarily conscious nor deliberate. Purposeful action "can never be groundless", because "acting randomly is not acting purposefully" (Ibid.). Grounded action is in response to a stimulus which tells the agent that there are the right conditions for that action: "conditions obtain which make that action appropriate to its purpose" (Ibid.). The example given is that of a shark that smells blood in the water. The shark interprets the smell of blood as prey and swims over it for an easy meal. Here is how ground and purpose are linked: "those actions are determined by the shark's instincts, which exist in order that prey may be seized. And those instincts are grounded in a correlation between blood and prey that explains their retention in shark evolution" (Ibid.).

But this does not mean that the shark cannot be wrong; in fact, it can never be sure it will be right. Prey may manage to escape, a shark may have its senses altered and take the smell of petrol for blood, the blood may be a fisherman's bait, etc. These cases exemplify fallibilism, a feature of all semiosis linked to the ultimate uncertainty of the relation between genuine signs and their objects. Fallibilism is the correlative of another feature of semiosis, the notion of *proper* interpretation: "The proper interpretation of a sign is one that is grounded in a relation which justifies an interpretant of that type relative to its purpose" (Id.: 224; see also CP 5.475, 1906/7). I am aware that talk of a 'proper' interpretation may ruffle post-structuralist feathers; however, the principle of proper interpretation somehow implies the possibility of translation. At any rate, the life of a shark is much simpler than that of a post-structuralist thinker; considering that sharks have

been around for 400 million years (modern varieties for 100 million or so), they must have little doubt that the signs they really care for have proper interpretations. This double reference to ground and purpose finally takes us out of circular or regressive accounts of meaning: “The meaning of a sign is a type of interpretant [ie, an interpretation] as would be justified, given some possible purpose” (Short 2003: 224–5). The smell of blood is a sign that is properly interpreted as referring to prey; also, relative to the shark’s purpose, its instinct to swim towards the blood and expect nearby prey *is* the meaning of the sign (more at Short 2004, esp. 233–5). The instinct is the evolutionary habit that guides shark behaviour. This teleological account of shark semiosis is pictured in figure 1:

Figure 1



Why equating habit with meaning? The mature form of Peirce’s theory of signs broke the circle of unlimited semiosis when Peirce identified the ‘ultimate logical interpretant’ of a sign in the habit (cf. CP 5.476, 5.494 of 1906/7 and Selection no. 28 in Peirce 1992–98, vol. 2: 398–433, see also 2.7 above). A habit is general and repeatable but it is not a sign, at least not in the same way as the sign that precedes it. At the end of his life, Peirce provided the “possibility of a translation from meaning to fulfilment. That which was meant may become realized in habit, action, and feeling. [... It moves] from one sphere of existence to another, radically different sphere. [... T]he meaning of words are found in their uses” (Short 2003: 230).

Some may object that this is just a clever account of animal behaviour, but human beings are like sharks only figuratively—and not all of them. Here Short provides one of his most brilliant solutions by appealing to human curiosity. What makes our curiosity unique is that humans direct their thinking to mostly everything and curiosity is an end in itself: “there is a purpose to seek out and interpret all sorts of signs, even if they have no practical bearing on our lives” (Id.: 225). In fact, this cognitive behaviour has the most ‘practical bearing on our lives’ because curiosity ensures and reinforces our evolutionary advantage. Another objection may be that Short’s account is about the interpretation of natural signs; how about the production and interpretation of signs which—like most material involved in translation semiosis—comes into existence *in order to* modify the cognitive horizon of others in certain, predictable ways? The main difference between these two classes of sign involves the ground. The ground of such signs as ‘falling barometric pressure predicts bad weather’ has been there before any actual interpreter discovered and used it. These signs are interpreter-independent. On the other hand, signs like ‘a peacock display signals readiness to mate’ are correlated to their objects by force of habit or disposition to interpretation. This kind of ground requires interpreters (peahens in this case) as ontological conditions. Human languages belong to the latter with the added twist that the habits or dispositions that guide our interpretation of words (etc.) are mostly learned—as opposed to inherited at birth—and we can be conscious of them.

3.12.1 Short on translation

Before relating this complex and enlightening argument to translation, Short takes us into the theory of the interpretant which, again, he reconstructs from Peirce’s many and somehow uncertain accounts (see 2.6 above). Short identifies two basic classifications: an interpretant may have the nature of i) a feeling, like our response to music; ii) an action, like the execution of a command; and iii) a thought, “including the translation of a symbol” (Id.: 226). This division looks at what interpretants are made of, so to speak; Peirce called them emotional, energetic, and logical,

respectively. One brief note on this division: although these three are equally legitimate interpretants of a sign, only the logical interpretant is properly speaking itself a sign. As to the other two, “though they lack the meaning of the signs they interpret, they may be said to have realized that meaning. The soldier who obeys a command does what his commander meant him to do” (Ibid.). This is what Short meant when he spoke of signs ultimately issuing not only in habit, but also in ‘action and feeling’. The second classification has to do with modes of being: there are first interpretants which are vague potentialities that must be actualised and second interpretants which are such actualisations. As to the third interpretant, Short writes that it is “that interpretant which would be formed given complete relevant information about [the object of the sign]” (Id.: 227). The names Peirce gave to this division are immediate, dynamic, and final, respectively. Let me point out that only dynamic interpretants exist as particulars; both immediate and final interpretants are general. This means that, given a certain ground/purpose pairing, for each sign there is an indefinite number of dynamic interpretants, but only one immediate and one final interpretant. Also, the two classifications are independent from each other because they are based on different criteria. So, a potential (immediate) interpretant can be emotional, energetic, or logical. Finally, “the immediate interpretant is what we have been calling a “proper interpretation”” (Id.: 227) because it coincides with the potential ability to generate actual dynamic interpretants.

Let us now see how Short applies these two divisions to translation. The emotional/energetic/logical division can help translator analyse source and target texts. For instance, Short considers the translation of a form of endearment like French *petit chou* into English. He states that ‘sweetheart’ preserves the emotional but not the logical interpretant whereas ‘my little cabbage’ would do the reverse (cf. Id.: 226). I suspect Short uses his enormous knowledge and intellectual strength to rehash a trade-off as old as Cicero. Just as disappointingly, he endorses Jakobson’s conclusion “that poetry is untranslatable” (Id.: 227). His next sentence is unwittingly apt: “More can be done with the logical/energetic/emotional trichotomy” (Ibid.). His second application is less trivial and more controversial; referring to the immediate/dynamic/final division,

Short claims: “Of the three types of meaning, only the immediate interpretant would seem to be germane to translation. The translation of a sentence, statement, or story is successful only insofar as it has the same immediate interpretant as that which is translated” (Ibid.). This is interesting because it brings the ‘equivalence’ constraint down to the level of potentiality. A good translation shares its *potential* meaning with its original; interpretants that belong to the two remaining classes are in the hands of the translator. To her, dynamic and logical interpretant are fields of expressive opportunities, not constraints. Finally, Short points out that we don’t translate propositions but utterances, therefore circumstances and speaker’s meaning should be considered over and above meaning potential. This is where Short makes explicit reference to speech-act theory citing Austin and Grice and claiming that the “‘intended meaning,’ as we might call it, is [...] a form of immediate interpretant: it is the immediate interpretant of an utterance” (Id.: 228). With this statement Short goes out on a limb again because he drags Peirce out of his cosy metaphysical environment and into pragmatics. This move chimes with my adoption of Relevance theory—a research area grown out of the seeds planted by Paul Grice—as a complementary theory of reference for the present study (see Ch. 5).

3.13 Eco. Translation theory lite

There is a temptation, which I shall resist, to speak of a ‘Bologna school of translation semiotics’. In School Year 1993/94 the university of Bologna held its first seminar on translation from a semiotic perspective. Some of the texts prepared for the occasion were collected in (Nergaard and Franci 1999). The offering was repeated in 1998 and again in 1999 (texts collected in Dusi and Nergaard 2000). This coincided with a ‘translation turn’ in the research interests of Bologna university’s leading figure: Umberto Eco (eg. Eco 1995, 1999, 2000b, 2001, 2003b; 2003a also includes an autobiographical account of the author’s interest in translation at pp. 10–12). Other semioticians connected to Bologna began to write on or about translation at about the same time, albeit to a more limited extent: Paolo Fabbri (Fabbri 2000a, 2000b), Omar Calabrese (Calabrese 2000) and

Giampaolo Proni (Goethals et al. 1999–2000; Proni and Stecconi 1999). Finally younger scholars and researchers have contributed to this surge of interest in translation in Bologna semiotic circles; I will cite Nicola Dusi (Dusi 2003) and Siri Nergaard (Eco and Nergaard 1998; Nergaard 1993a, 1993b, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001). I will review the writings of Siri Nergaard in the next section of this chapter; here I would like to report on the remarkably consistent contributions by Umberto Eco.

The bulk of Umberto Eco's writings on translation seem to follow a plan he explicitly stated in "Riflessioni teorico–pratiche sulla traduzione" (Eco 1995). His essay, he announced, would include reflections born at the interface of "theoretical concerns and experiences which I happened to make as I followed the work of my translators" (Eco 1995: 122, all translations in this section are mine). This early text looks like a matrix for future writings when it comes to style of argumentation as well; it includes a wealth of personal anecdotes as translated author and translator interspersed with scattered theoretical statements. In effect, Eco's earliest pieces on translation had been totally experiential; such as the introduction to his translation of *Exercices de style* (Queneau 1983; cf. Calabrese 2000: 116) and an account of his failed attempt to translate Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo* (Eco 1985). The central topics that Eco would develop in his later writings are also included in "Riflessioni teorico–pratiche sulla traduzione". Here is a selection:

- "translation is one form of interpretation" (Eco 1995: 123);
- a plea for faithfulness to "the intention of the text if not the intention of the author" (Ibid.; for this distinction see Eco 1990, esp. Ch. 1);
- a view of translation theory as broadly semiotic in character (cf. Eco 1995: 124); and
- the brilliant argument against an account of translation based on metalanguage (reprinted eg. in Eco and Nergaard 1998: 220–221; see 3.3.1 above).

The article also manifests Eco's disconcerting reliance on a textual model based on the divisions Louis Hjelmslev devised to describe human languages (Eco 1995: 140, reprinted in Eco 1999: 103 ff., Eco 2003a: 39 ff. and, in expanded form, Eco 2000: 64 ff. and Eco 2001: 82 ff.).

“Riflessioni teorico–pratiche sulla traduzione” summarises what translation is about in a short passage; let me paraphrase it.

A satisfactory translation should render the sense of the original (ie, render it *almost* unchanged, and if change it must, then it should *add* and not *contradict* the source). Operationally, though, let us not forget that translating means interpreting, which in turn means betting that the sense we recognise in a text is the sense of *that* text. The sense translators seek is not preserved in a pure language; it can only be the result of an interpretive inference, it is not to be found in *no language’s land*, but it is the result of a bet. [... U]nderstanding a context is a hermeneutic act, which implies a circle [...]. The hermeneutic circle too has the character of a bet” (Eco 1995: 139).

It is in this context that Eco writes: “the principle of interpretive bet somehow implies the principle of faithfulness” (Ibid.). This would be a surprising statement if one did not make reference to ‘the limits of interpretation’ (cf. Nergaard 2000: 291). Here is my reconstruction following Peirce’s epistemology (based on his ‘community of interpreters’) and ontology (cf. CP 5.311, 1868). The target text gives evidence of an interpretation of the source text; this interpretation is constrained in two ways: by the search of a consensus in the relevant community of interpreters and by conformity (or, at least, not contradiction) with the real. Therefore, “faithfulness criteria may change, but (i) they must be negotiated within a given culture and (ii) they must remain consistent within the translated text” (Eco 1995: 139). The latter point is more restrictive than my reconstruction; it means that the solutions included in the target text should all give evidence of one and the same interpretation of the source, whatever it be.

Eco’s views—which, I repeat, he kept more or less unchanged in his later writings on translation—did not go down well with Anthony Pym who fiercely criticised him for being, among other things, inconsistent, outdated and contradictory: “In the parts based on Jakobson and Peirce, Eco believes in semiosis; when he is adapting Hjelmslev and searching for Aristotelian categories, meaning is suddenly fixed and stable” (Pym 2001). On the one hand, I share Pym’s disappointment; on the other, it should be remembered that his notes on translation admittedly lie at the interface

between direct experience and his broader theoretical concerns. In particular, I would draw the attention of the critics to two of his works published shortly before the 1995 essay under review: *The Limits of Interpretation* (Eco 1990) and *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Eco et al. 1992). In these works, Eco fought a gallant battle against certain post-structuralist and deconstructionist strains, especially those that have become popular among theorists and critics of literature in the United States (cf. also Eco 1994, esp. Ch. 4). The closing lines of “Riflessioni teorico-pratiche” read: “I believe I have shown that there are intra-subjective and critically well-grounded ways to assess [a translation] with reference to the original text as well, or at least to one of its possible interpretations” (Eco 1995: 146). This may not be particularly enlightening for translation scholars, but it is highly relevant in the broader post-structuralist debate. More specifically, establishing criteria for the comparability of texts in the context of translation creates a precedent that can be used more generally in the context of text semiotics. In sum, I believe that Eco effectively used translation to reinforce his case against what he called the ‘hermetic drift’ of interpretation (cf. Eco 1990, esp. Ch. 2).

Eco’s latest major works on translation theory are from 2003: *Dire quasi la stessa cosa* (Eco 2003a) and *Mouse or Rat?* (Eco 2003b). I will use the Italian title as a narrative backbone for my chapter 6. Here, I want to see what has changed and what has stayed the same in Eco’s theory of translation. We can find again the plea for an approach that balances direct experience and theoretical discourse (cf. Eco 2003a: 12). Eco complains that many translation scholars made him think they had never translated. I would not disagree, but Eco’s remedy is overkill: the rest of the book is in effect an anthology of examples where the theoretical insights are few and far between. Quite uncharacteristically for a leading semiotician at ease with the most abstract arguments, Eco states that this work “*does not claim to be a book on translation theory*” (Id.: 15), where the stress is on ‘theory’. One new element that gets introduced in this book—or perhaps an old element with a new and more explicit expression—is negotiation: “I believe that many familiar concepts in translation studies (equivalence, skopos, faithfulness and translator’s creative powers) fall under the

aegis of *negotiation*” (Id.: 17). Considering that Eco had already written about negotiation as a basis for both meaning and reference (intentionality) (Eco 1997; English translation Eco 2000a), it is not surprising that the notion would take centre stage for the problems of translation as well. ‘Negotiation’ is meant in very tangible, almost commercial terms: quid pro quo, trade off, and fair gains for all the parties when a deal is struck. The negotiating parties need not be people, though; they are described as the source text with its independent rights; the empirical author with his or her wish to control the process; and the whole source culture. On the target side we can find the new text, the target culture, readers’ presumed expectations, and possibly editorial policies. The relevant factors of translation are described in such clear terms because Eco blithely states that “Since personal experiences are my starting point, it is clear that I am interested in the topic of *translation proper*, the sort carried out in publishing houses” (Id.: 19). This should be a warning against the temptation to generalise Eco’s statements and views to all translating. However, his insistence on negotiation does have general semiotic implications insofar as it reinforces the indexical character of translating: a process that establishes its own rule as it occurs. In contrast, the many places in Eco’s text where the notion of negotiation recurs make one think of a new label for the old ‘lost (and gained) in translation’ motif: “not all negotiations fairly distribute gains and losses to the parties” (Id.: 94). There is no harm in pointing out that you may win more than your fair share or lose out in translation interactions. However, the trope should be taken with a grain of salt. Among other things, it entails that translation semiosis is a zero-sum game. This is far from certain; very often translating is co-operative semiosis and—when this happens—it is a win-win situation: not only does it make more slices of the cake, it also makes it larger.

Dire quasi la stessa cosa includes scattered notes on an issue that is central for my present research: the relation between translation and interpretation in general. Here is one:

Theories of translation are ill starred, because any such theory should move from a clear and solid notion of “equivalence of meaning”. However, many pages on semantics and

philosophy of language define meaning as that which remains unchanged (or equivalent) in translation processes. This is a vicious circle that is difficult to ignore (Id.: 26).

The parallel is not totally symmetrical, because often philosophers of language deal with virtual and general notions of meaning, whereas translating always involves the re-enactment of actual and particular texts. Also, the quotation seems to assume that 'equivalence of meaning' is an essential feature of any possible notion of translation. I would agree (see 4.4.1), provided one is ready to endorse a fairly broad theory of meaning. In actual communication events, like those that get translated, it should include proposition-, utterance-, and speaker's meaning (cf. Short 2003: 228). Eco is obviously aware that the analogy is imperfect and the circle only apparently vicious. Later on in the text he concludes a discussion of Peirce's interpretant as follows: "such a broad conception of interpretant implies that if a translation is certainly an interpretation, not always an interpretation is a translation " (Id.: 87). This clarifies the relative position between translation semiosis and semiosis in general and corresponds to a basic assumptions of the present study (see Ch. 4).

Apart from the unoriginal but authoritative statement that T-semiosis is a special form of semiosis (theme number 7), it is hard to find earth-shattering contributions to translation semiotics in these writings; I would say that along the years Eco has given us a version of 'translation theory lite'. In spite of this, I would recommend his texts to anyone. For example, *Dire quasi la stessa cosa* is a tremendous read, above all because—as it candidly states—it uses the language of conversation (cf. Eco 2003: 12). What I described above as an anthology of examples is in fact a quarry of quotable quotations: amusing, intriguing, and charming. One example is Eco's endorsement of Federico Montanari's proposal that the old terms 'source' and 'target' should make room to *fonte* and *foce* (source-text and mouth-text, as in the mouth of a river; cf. Montanari 2000). Eco is quick to pick on the implications: estuary texts, delta-texts... (Eco 2003, Ch. 7, especially p. 195) to which I would add water basin, tributaries, underground river, and the idea that translation semiosis flows across (at least) a border, but the river is essentially one and the same from end to end. The book closes on a beautiful humanist's appeal which entreats us to think of faithfulness as:

the disposition to believe that translation is always possible provided we conspire with the source text and interpret it passionately. Faithfulness is the commitment to identify what we believe is the deep sense of the text and the relentless ability to negotiate what we believe is the best solution. If you look up *faithfulness* in a dictionary, you will see that *exactitude* is not among its synonyms; you will find instead *loyalty*, *fairness*, *respect*, *piety* (Id.: 364).

3.14 Nergaard. Italy's best translation scholar

In spite of the translation and interpreting boom in Italian universities in the past few years (7,826 students in 32 universities as of 30 Nov. 2004),⁷ serious research in the field is still lagging behind in the land where the modern term for translation first appeared around the year 1420 (cf. Folena 1991: 60 ff.). The situation is not flattering, and some privately quip that Italy's best translation scholar is Norwegian, which—of course—is all very well in the age of European integration. Siri Nergaard is this Norwegian; a scholar with the distinction of having edited the first ever anthologies of translation theory in Italian (Nergaard 1993b, 1995). Apart from this commendable work, Nergaard has some interesting things of her own to say about translation. And because she has been a student of Umberto Eco's, some of her writings explore translation semiotics with an eclectic slant. I have already quoted from the essay she co-authored with Eco for the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (Eco and Nergaard 1998) and from the two special issues of the semiotic journal *Versus* she co-edited (Nergaard and Franci 1999; Dusi and Nergaard 2000). Here I would like to review three pieces she published in her impeccable and elegant Italian between 2000 and 2001.

⁷ Government data at <http://www.miur.it/scripts/im04/ConfrontiNov30.asp>

3.14.1 “Un approccio semiotico alla traduzione multimediale”

The Bologna translation seminars of the 1990s devoted a lot of attention to nonverbal signs, as is to be expected of a roomful of semioticians. “Un approccio semiotico alla traduzione multimediale” (Nergaard 2000b) is consistent with that mood. The essay makes one simple point: a semiotic approach can help us deal with the special problems multimedia texts present to translation. Why do we need a semiotic approach in the first place? Nergaard observes that the fast development of translation studies in the 80s and 90s has created a consensus around the fact that translating is not only about verbal language. However—she adds—a theoretical model that covers all the sign systems involved is still lacking (cf. Id.: 432). On this basis, Nergaard proposes a model for the analysis of multimedia texts, which—she warns with characteristic precision—should not be mistaken for a model for the act of translating. Nergaard assumes, with Eco, that translating is a form of interpretation which is best described in the terms of Peirce’s semiotics. She also believes that a comprehensive textual–semiotic analysis is needed in the translation of all multimedia texts, even when the process involves only one semiotic system, as in the case of dubbing. Verbal language cannot “be translated independently from its context, assuming that the other sign systems—eg, aural or visual—are universal or that their interpretation remains unaffected by the shift to another natural language” (Id.: 440; all translations in this section are mine).

Three textual–semiotic tools are identified as most useful for translation semiosis: Eco’s notions of model reader, encyclopaedia, and *intentio operis*. A **model reader** is a figure inscribed in all texts which empirical readers can follow as a pattern for their interpretative co–operation with the text itself. One of the tasks of the translator is to inscribe a *new* model reader into the text for the target environment. This task, I would add, is anticipated by the original in the growing number of texts that are produced with their translation in mind (internationalised, in the localisation industry jargon). Nergaard points out that the concept of model reader helps us identify the knowledge required to actualise the textual strategy proposed by the target text.

This is where the notion of **encyclopaedia** kicks in. By encyclopaedia Eco meant a semantic system which includes concepts, their meanings, and—crucially—their usage. The partial encyclopaedia needed to make sense of a source text may not correspond to the average encyclopaedia of a target culture, which is defined as the “knowledge of a given culture at a given moment in time” (Id.: 443). This tool is useful to account for a specific aspect of the work of translators: the knowledge they assume and require for the correct interpretation of new texts compared to the knowledge actually possessed by their likely readers. “Translation is dialectically located in between these two encyclopaedias” (Ibid.).

We have briefly met the third concept, *intentio operis*, (‘intention of the text’ in 3.13 above). This is how Nergaard explains it: “it is the task of the reader [...] to make inferences on the text and identify its intention” (Ibid.). *Intentio operis* is based on the principle that all texts are internally consistent: an inference that is justified by one part of the text should be confirmed (or, at least, not contradicted) by other parts of the same text. Nergaard rightly claims that this tool would allow translators to carry out a deeper analysis than that afforded by syntactical or semantic structures. She also adds an *intentio* specific to translation, that of the target culture. A target culture—she claims—may have its own “expectations, (linguistic) constraints, norms and rules (for instance on the use of images and music). [...] The outcome of a translation is determined by the mediation between *intentio operis* and the *intentio* of a culture” (Id.: 444).

Nergaard seems to follow a consistent strategy through her arguments: she identifies translation problems and represents them as tensions between two dialectical poles. Then she represents translating as solving those problems and places it on a third pole. Therefore, in each of the three cases above, translating ends up in an implicit or explicit position of mediation. In this respect and looking only at the dates of publication, Nergaard anticipated Eco’s idea of translation as mediation by three years. Because mediation implies an original and active response, not a mere reaction, the third pole is not like the mid-point of a segment; it actually adds one dimension to the figure and forms a triangle of which translation occupies one corner.

This paper proposes one last tool to improve the textual analysis of translators: Algirdas Greimas' concept of utterance (or *énonciation*, as distinct from statement or *énoncé*) which I would leave to the specialists of structuralist–generative semiotics. Besides, the author does not seem to draw any useful conclusion from this concept, apart from some general statements.

3.14.2 Conclusions to *Versus*

The conclusions in the special issue of the journal *Versus* devoted to translation (Dusi and Nergaard 2000) pull together the issues raised and discussed during the translation seminars held in Bologna in 1998 and 1999. Nergaard informs us that the seminars took off from one question: can one talk of translation when nonverbal signs are involved? At the end of the exercise, her answer is that 'intersemiotic' is a character presupposed by *all* translating (cf. Nergaard 2000: 285). The author reviews and comments the contributions she edited and included in the volume. I will skip much of her reporting and focus on her four main conclusions.

Firstly, Nergaard writes that to delimit translation one should not look at the substances that get transposed, but at the very act of transposing; in other words, translation semiosis can only be defined as an event. Let me add that this does not mean that object–like entities and characters are irrelevant to the investigation of translation semiosis; it only means that they are useless if one looks for an answer to the general question: 'what can one mean by translating?'. Nergaard believes that translation "is an umbrella term" (Id.: 286) and cannot be defined once and for all. At most—she adds—it can be characterised by a threefold move: i) text A is interpreted by means of *transposition* into text B; ii) some elements of text B are totally *transformed* with respect to text A; iii) other elements remain *invariable*, constant and present (cf. Ibid.). These three statements are very close to the three characters in my model. In particular, transformation is a Peircean third and corresponds to my 'mediation'; transposition is a Peircean second and corresponds to my 'difference'; and invariability is a Peircean first which corresponds to my 'similarity' (see Ch. 4). Nergaard adds that this is a "generic and open definition" (Ibid.) and that the concept of translation "can be defined in a

totally *ad hoc* fashion in the actual production of specific texts presented as translations of specific source texts” (Ibid.). Far from being a methodological weakness, this is a logical consequence of the strategy the author adopted. Her move describes the *conditions* of translation semiosis, which are by their very nature general, potential and vague. I maintain that this is the only soil where the seeds for a general theory of translation can take root and grow. Nergaard’s next claim is also consistent with this interpretation of her threefold move: “*translatability* is not something we can avail ourselves of. In other words, the limits and possibilities of the translatable cannot be established *a priori*; rather, the texts themselves will reveal these limits and possibilities to us” (Ibid.). We need to draw a distinction between two questions here: one thing is to ask ‘what is translation?’ and another ‘what is translatable?’. Only the former affords a general answer. We can only say what are the limits and potential of translation semiosis; however, only after actual translation events take place can we say how and to what extent the signs involved are (were) translatable.

Secondly, Nergaard shows that the ordinary criteria we use to tell a translation from a nontranslation grossly overstate the importance of semiotic systems. Let me elaborate on her clever argument. If I show you a written page and tell you that it is the translation of another written page, you will probably accept my statement at face value. However, if I show you a poem and tell you it is the translation of a video clip, you would ask a lot of questions. Nergaard’s point is simple: there is no guarantee that the interlinguistic character makes ‘better’ translations than the intersemiotic one. Her illustration of this point is lucid. Suppose for a moment that perfect (albeit ideal and unattainable) equivalence exists and that we can rank translations with reference to it. We will surely find that some intersemiotic translations are higher up in the league than some interlinguistic ones. In other words, preserving the material with which source and target texts are expressed does not necessarily determine the quality of translating.

Thirdly, Nergaard breaks ranks with Eco on the assumption that there exists a ‘hard core’ of translation and that this core is the notion of literalness. This assumption is quickly dismissed and contrasted with the position of Calabrese whose claim—much more sensible if unoriginal—is that

we translate texts, not semiotic systems (cf. Id.: 291–2). According to the Norwegian scholar, Calabrese is closer to the original intent of the Bologna seminars which was: “not so much a systematic review of all semiotic systems to arrive at a general theory of their translation, rather [it was] a simpler reflection on the translation of texts *regardless* of the systems in which they are expressed” (Id.: 292). You will agree with me that Nergaard found an elegant way out of an old fallacy: that of regarding translation as something involving above all general entities (eg, the problem of grammatical gender between Spanish and English). We translate particulars at all times; we can only use generals in our theory to: i) understand what makes translation semiosis possible and ii) understand how actual translation semiosis is regulated.

One methodological note in closing. In her discussion of the target-oriented turn that translation studies took since the 1980s, Nergaard describes the typical work of a translation scholar as follows: “he or she deals with texts that are presented as translations; his or her task is analysing in which way the target text relates to the source text and, later, he or she will assess whether this relation can be defined as a translation relation” (Id.: 293). Thus, translation Studies gains three times from the target-oriented approach: i) it finally has a stable object of study: existing translations as defined on the target side; ii) it can empirically explore actual relations between these and their originals; and iii) it can seek to explain these relations, including by defining translation and translatability. However, this definition will always remain specific and *ad hoc*. A footnote clarifies that target-oriented translation studies may well study source-oriented translations; target-orientedness describes the method, not the object of study because “the very decision to do a translation and, consequently, the way in which it is carried out proceed from the target system” (Ibid. n7). I have two objections. First, in the age of localisation more and more translation projects are willed into being on the source side; in principle, the decision to translate can be taken on the source side, on the target side, and by the mediators themselves in a third space which is neither source nor target (see 5.6 below and its subsections). Second, empirical observation is a good thing, but one should not forget abduction. The passage between the second and the third stage above corresponds to the

passage from the observation of the real (facts, events or relations) to their intellectual accounts. If a given observation proves existing beliefs wrong, the researcher must formulate a hypothesis and look for new explanations. These hypotheses need not be local; if one decides to investigate a very broad issue such as ‘what is translating?’ one may well formulate a hypothesis that can be tested in all cases regardless of any condition of occurrence. I believe this is exactly what Nergaard did with her threefold move discussed above.

3.14.3 “Semiotica interpretativa e traduzione”

If Nergaard seemed not to realise the full import of her positions in 2000, her 2001 article sets off with a bold statement: “It goes without saying that each translation is unique and has its special features. However, it seems to me that there exist some features which are shared by all translational practices beyond their distinctiveness” (Nergaard 2001: 57). Gone is the insistence that explanatory accounts be specific and *ad hoc*. Since the author still keeps to her interpretive–semiotic approach, the first consequence of this new position is the need to break the vicious circle between translation and interpretation: “every translation is an interpretation, but the reverse does not apply” (Id.: 59). In other words, translation is a proper subset of interpretation. As to the membership criteria, Nergaard says they depend on conditions of occurrence: culture, text type, time, etc.

The essay describes the original text in terms of a Peircean sign, which leads to interesting questions: how does the object determine (ie, delimit) the sign? From which viewpoint (or ground) does the sign ‘digest’ the object out there? Above all, the author notes that there is no guarantee the object–sign relation can be reproduced using target–system signs. The source text–target text relation is represented as the relation between two Peircean signs running one after another along the chain of semiosis. According to this model, the first interpretant (the original) becomes a sign for the second interpretant (the translation) (Id.: 61). Again, apart from negligible problems of Peircean ‘mechanics’, this is a productive way of putting things: “The relationship between the first

and the second sign (in which the latter represents the former) is marked both by equivalence and difference” (Id.: 62). Again, this corresponds almost verbatim to a slice of my model as described in chapter 4 below. In particular, I would fully subscribe to Nergaard’s account of equivalence (‘similarity’ is the term I prefer):

translation is *equivalent* to its original *in some respect or capacity, for* a thought that interprets it. Therefore, equivalence is not established mechanically but ‘in that thought’. In other words, it is equivalent for someone who established equivalence using criteria that were intersubjectively valid or, to use Peirce’s term, shared by the community of interpreters (Ibid.).

The application of Peirce’s theory of sign also shows that a translation in principle enriches its original, because an interpretant always says more than the sign. This insight makes room for translation’s creative side, which is common experience for most translators but is impossible to account for in other theories of translation such as those based on the code model (see 5.3.1 below). At this point, Nergaard plunges into the theory of the interpretant and ends up like a fish in the net: the more she wriggles the more she tangles up. I advise the inquisitive reader to go through pp. 65–69 of this essay with a lot of caution, or skip them altogether.

In spite of this serious slippage, the essay is worth reading for the four closing paragraphs alone. The interpretive model presented here—says Nergaard—applies to translation in general, regardless of genre, text–type and media/semiotic system involved. Nergaard explains that a semiotic model makes this possible because “It is something like a formal model of the complex cognitive operations that take place in any kind of translation” (Id.: 74). Its benefits include the fact that it makes no distinction between verbal and nonverbal signs, therefore it is easily applicable to intersemiotic (multimedia) translation. Most importantly, Nergaard realises the unique benefit of a semiotic model which

does not establish *a priori* the possible, likely or mandatory relations between the translation and its original. The model simply says that i) the translation (the final logical

interpretant) establishes a new relation with the sign (of the original) and ii) it establishes a new relation between the sign and the object. This latter relation, as we saw above, depends on the *respect or capacity* chosen to interpret the object (Id.: 74).

What Siri Nergaard has brought to translation semiotics are above all her lucid arguments on multimedia translation (theme number 3), in particular her conclusions that all translating necessarily involves more than one semiotic system and that we overestimate the need to keep the same semiotic system between the original and its translation. We will also profit from her work under theme number 5, which strengthened semiotics as a methodological toolbox for translation research and theory. The semiotic approach, she wrote, “is open enough to embrace all aspects relevant to translation, and restricted enough to prevent one from regarding any transformative operation as translation” (Id.: 73). I agree with this conclusion, even though the model Nergaard actually presents keeps this promise only in part. As you know by now, my favourite theme is number 8; from it, I will take home Nergaard’s neat argument that led her to define translation in general in terms of *transposition*, *transformation*, and *invariability*.

3.15 Conclusions

What can one learn from this bird’s eye view of translation–semiotics literature? The first conclusion is a bit of a mystery. It appears that the semiotics of translation was right there in some of the seminal contributions to contemporary translation theory. Jakobson’s article (Jakobson 1959) is perhaps the single most influential essay in translation studies; van Kesteren’s contribution (Kesteren 1978) was selected to appear in the proceedings of the conference that helped establish translation studies; Gideon Toury is one of our leading authors, and his entry (Toury 1986) figures in a classic work edited by the late great semiotician Thomas Sebeok (Sebeok 1986). Finally, (Gorlée 1989) appeared in the maiden issue of *Target*, which would go on to become translation studies most prestigious journal. There is a question I have asked four times in this chapter: Why did these promising beginnings not start a translation–semiotic school? Why is there not a critical

mass of authors that are turning translation studies towards Peirce, or turning Peirce scholarship towards translation theory? A simple answer is the practical constraints to the circulation of ideas: Van Kesteren's essay appeared in a book brought out by an obscure academic publisher with a circulation limited to specialist circles; similarly, few translation scholars would look for Toury's text in Sebeok's volume. Another reason has to do with interdisciplinarity. Translation scholarship has often been described as an interdiscipline. The strange case of translation semiotics may serve as a cautionary tale, for it tells us that interdisciplinarity has its limits too. It is very hard indeed for an honest translation scholar to become familiar with interpretive semiotics. Although I can adduce only anecdotal evidence, it is fair to say that it takes several years of dedicated study to make enough sense of the primary and secondary literature. Peirce was a very original thinker; although he died in 1914, Deely convincingly claims he was the first post-modern thinker (Deely 2003: 28–50 and *passim*). It is clear that his philosophy was decades ahead of his time; it is possible that its full import is still ahead of ours. To make matters worse, Peirce rarely made an effort to make himself understood; his lines of argument are impossibly dense and his prose obscure. Even his friend and fellow philosopher William James once described the lectures Peirce gave at Harvard in 1903 as “flashes of brilliant insight relieved against Cimmerian darkness.” (CP 5.1n, 1907). Getting into Peirce is like climbing the North Face of Mount Everest: you know it is going to be very hard; but if you can make it, the reward is enormous. It seems to me that very few people are willing to invest so much time and energy for what remains an uncertain result. Perhaps today's typical academic simply cannot afford to adopt a ‘high-risk, high-stakes’ strategy. As a result, as Cosculluela remarked, very few among the small number of translation scholars who adopted semiotic approaches got their Peirce right (Cosculluela 2003: 113–116). Semioticians are not totally innocent either. As I said, Peirce's philosophy is not easy to master, but this is no excuse. On the

contrary, it should encourage the specialists—including semiotically-inclined translation scholars⁸—to try harder and make it more understandable and relevant.

In spite of this, a wave of optimism runs through the authors reviewed, many of whom predict that interpretive semiotics is crucial for the future of translation theory. None is more upbeat than Peeter Torop, who thinks that the establishment of a semiotics of translation as a full-fledged discipline is just a matter of time. Many others believe semiotics can provide the best ground on which to build translation studies as a truly inter-disciplinary field of studies; these include Lawendowski and Van Kesteren in their pioneering 1978 articles and Cosculluela as recently as 2003. Gorrée even speaks of semiotics as a ‘paradigm’ for translation. Whatever shape the field will take, I am convinced it will have to account for the fact that translating is a special form of semiosis insofar as it aims to represent other text-signs across a semiotic barrier. If this is correct, then translation studies should include at least three branches: i) the study of target signs in target environments, independent of their relations with the source side; ii) source–target relations, especially the relations that hold between the target sign and the signs on the source side (including the original) it is meant to represent as a translation; and iii) translation semiosis; its character, strategies, and norms. If translation studies does establish itself as a semiotic-based interdisciplinary, it will have kept the promise its name holds: it will define and organise its own field much as cultural studies, communication studies, media studies, etc. have done in the past.

Let me remind you of the eight broad themes I have followed throughout this chapter:

1. Equivalence
2. Borders
3. Nonverbal signs
4. Why is translating difficult?

⁸ These labels are becoming more and more cumbersome, perhaps they will soon be altogether irrelevant.

5. Issues of method
6. From dyadic to triadic discourse
7. The semiotic nature of translation
8. Translation's specificity

We have seen what the reviewed authors had to say about them and most sections have ended with a discussion of their contributions. If I had only one word to characterise the scholars I have presented, I would doubtless say 'brave'. Interpretive semiotics encourages original attitudes towards translation; it stimulates a broad re-definition of the categories that are normally used in translation theory; and it leads to fresh insights. This courage is a logical consequence of the hallmark of Peirce's philosophy: the passage from dyadic to triadic discourse. The change is so fundamental that it carries many established assumptions with it. Thanks to triadism and their inherent continuity, semiotic models are dynamic, not static and they look primarily at events, not object-like entities. If translation is a form of sign-action, then our primary object of study should be translation semiosis itself. The fact that translation is semiotic in nature seems to be beyond contention. It remains to be seen whether it is a *specific* form of semiosis. How can one demarcate translation semiosis within semiosis in general with a sufficient degree of precision? How can one describe the relations between the two resulting entities? These relations are a recurrent source of uncertainty among the authors I have reviewed. Eco and Short do well to warn us against the circular description of translation in terms of semiosis and, at the same time, of semiosis in terms of translation. In the next chapter I will try to answer some of these questions. Almost all the conceptions I will employ have already appeared in this review scattered among the different authors. Betting on a unitary notion of translation, I will present a two-layered model that brings all these conceptions together thanks to their explicit association to Peirce's categories.

4 A General Theory of Translation: Core Notions

4.1 *The bet*

As we saw in chapter 3, the intrinsic generality of semiotic discourse has encouraged many authors to use it to investigate the very object of inquiry of translation studies. Considering translation's variability, this is a risky venture but not a desperate one. As Douglas Hofstadter remarked, even Proteus, in his metamorphoses, still remained himself (cf. Hofstadter 1997: 178). So, I also bet—with some trepidation—that T-semiosis is a special and identifiable form of semiosis.⁹

4.2 *Semiotics explains translation, not the other way round*

However, one has to be careful. There is an intimate relationship between the logic of translating and sign-action in general; so intimate in fact that the two terms have often been made to overlap. Chesterman (Chesterman 1997, 2000) argues that one of the most recurrent ideas in translation (his 'supermemes') is 'all writing is translating'. As memes are wont to do, this idea ignores academic boundaries. For instance, in the context of hermeneutics, Gadamer writes: "From the structure of translation [is] indicated the general problem of making what is alien our own." (Gadamer 1976: 19). In the context of literary theory, according to Wolfgang Iser the logic of translation sits at the core of communication in general (cf. Iser 1994, 2000; Iser and Budick 1995). Finally, in the context of criticism, George Steiner's *After Babel* has 'Understanding as Translation' for its opening chapter. There, translation is described as an activity that bridges a difference; when the difference is language we have 'external translation', when it is time we have 'internal translation'. As a consequence, "When we read or hear any language-statement from the past, be it Leviticus or

⁹ An earlier version of this chapter appeared as Stecconi 2004a.

last year's best-seller, we translate. Reader, actor, editor are translators of language out of time" (Steiner 1975: 28).

These positions are undoubtedly fascinating and not ungrounded. If one looks for points in common between T-semiosis and other forms of semiosis one can find many. In fact, one can even conclude that the semiotic features of what one calls translation constitute the basis of all thought, language, language use, and communication. However, this line of thinking will not help one clarify what one calls translation in the first place. These positions are also strategically unhelpful because, according to my starting hypothesis, semiosis is more general than T-semiosis. Therefore, one should use semiosis to explain what translation is like rather than using translation to explain what semiosis is like. This distinction is crucial to stake a claim for translating amid other forms of semiosis.

John Sallis has recently argued along similar lines:

But, granted the bond of thinking to discourse, the confinement of thinking to translation would seem to have followed only because of the excessive drift of the sense of *translation*; once translation is extended to cover the very operation of signification as such, it will contaminate, as it were, whatever is bound to discourse. On the other hand, one may, with some legitimacy no doubt, insist on limiting the drift of translation, on restricting the sense of the word such that it applies only to certain linkages between signifiers in different languages and perhaps also between signifiers in a single language (Sallis 2002: 2–3; cf. also Gorré 2004a for a review of his book).

I would not follow the American philosopher along the Saussurian view of language his quotation implies, but I would join him in his call for limiting the drift of the term 'translation'. I see semiosis as a central process of translation, in fact *the* central process. In the face of the variability of translation events and norms in space and time, a search for first qualities appears to me as the only viable strategy to *trace the edge of T-semiosis in the semiosphere*. This involves looking for the possibility of translation in general—ie, for its logico-semiotic conditions.

Before I proceed, let me hang a warning sign here: please do not to take a phrase like ‘tracing the edge of T-semiosis in the semiosphere’ as ekphrasis. It is certainly convenient to picture the semiosphere as a very large balloon and T-semiosis as a definite region of it. But this picture carries unwarranted implications with it. Firstly, T-semiosis is scattered at the interface between semiotic systems and is not a portion of the semiosphere in the same way as Finland is a portion of Europe. In fact, it is the very emergence of T-semiosis that helps us draw lines on the semiosphere. Secondly, I am looking for the possibility of translation, and it is terribly difficult to project a possibility onto space. Thirdly, my research will stop at the edge. I will not try to identify a positive content for T-semiosis. If I stood on the edge and looked into the region of translation, I would still look into blank space (but I would stand on the edge of *translation*, and not of other forms of semiosis).

4.3 *T-semiosis: events, norms and Foundation*

4.3.1 Events

Although I have stated earlier that this is a quest for translation’s first qualities, I should clarify at this point that T-semiosis obviously comprises entities that belong with the realm of secondness. In how many ways can one look for these translation entities? From an ontological viewpoint, there are two main options: looking for events or looking for objects (Smith and Varzi 2000; Varzi 2001, 2002). Consistent with my semiotic approach, I will regard T-semiosis not as a collection of objects, but primarily as a set of events—which are very often intentional actions (see Ch. 5). This corresponds to the insight that semiotic’s originary notion is that of continuous sign-action, not that of discrete signs (see 2.2, one application of Peirce’s continuity to translation is at 2.2.2).

Translation events are the existent particulars of T-semiosis. An element of factuality is present in all semiosis, otherwise the ‘tri-relative influence’ (cf. CP 5.484, c. 1907) that defines it would

not appear in the world of experience. Individual translation events require physical and mental effort, and have long been regarded as chains of problem-solving processes (cf. Levý 1967). Examples of translation events are easy to find. For instance, I could count how many of the 1,000 or so in-house translators at the European Commission are actually translating. These acts of translation eventually result in object-like entities. For instance, I can tell you that they typed over one billion characters between January and June 2003.¹⁰ However—as I argued in 2.2.2—if I am given the choice of looking at a translation problem from the viewpoint of product or process, I would almost invariably go for the latter. This is also a practical choice: the signs and texts translators use to represent their originals are not very special in themselves. If I had written these words in Italian and had them translated into English you would scarcely notice. It is true, on the other hand, that a trained eye can often tell a translation from a nontranslation, mainly thanks to interference effects (see 7.2 below) and corpus studies are finding statistical evidence of translation activity, such as a lower type-token ratio, normalisation and explicitation (cf. Laviosa 2003). But this is not surprising; if T-semiosis is a special form of semiosis, it stands to reason that it would result in detectable textual features. These effects of T-semiosis notwithstanding, speculative analysis and a focus on events are far more helpful than the empirical description of textual effects to circumscribe the field of translation.

4.3.2 Norms

The Commission officials who are at work in the Directorate General for Translation know very well what they are expected to do. Their practice is among the most regulated in the world. They follow staff regulations, house-style, terminological guidelines, their bosses' likes and dislikes, etc. On top of this, they were hired because they could meet the highest standards of excellence in the first place. The whole set of established preferences, indications, do's and don'ts that prescribe and

¹⁰ The exact figure is 1,047,133,500 characters.

regulate T-semiosis—together with the criteria and perceptions of what a translation and a good translation should be like—are the norms of translation.

Norm theory has become a sub-field of translation studies (eg, Schäffner 1999). Some scholars have specialised in the hunt for places and times in which people expected different things from translators than we do in the West today. To my knowledge, the best example of this hunt for different concepts of translation is the *Translations and Translation Theories East and West* project led by Theo Hermans and William Radice (more information at <http://www.soas.ac.uk/literatures/Projects/Translation/translation.html>). The main tenet of this sub-field is that the prevalent norms in the Western world today are not universal, because translation norms reflect and affect the cultures they are part of. This is very important for my plan because it indicates that norms are not likely to reflect features and patterns that would hold for translation in general. The variability of the concept of translation and the law-like character of norms are consistent with the insight that translation norms belong with thirdness. To be more precise, norms are Peircean habits (see 2.12.1 above for a fuller discussion). Like habits, norms are rules for action (cf. CP 5.397, 1878) that social groups at given times apply to translatorial behaviour and that regulate the reception and evaluation of translations. Insofar as these norms are internalised by translators, they are tendencies to act in a certain way when certain conditions hold (cf. CP 5.12 n.1, c.1907).

It is often noted that translating is an exquisitely non-exact science. “Translators, more than anyone else, are aware of the fact that no document is ever translated the same way by two different people” (White 2003: 213). So, how can one reconcile this great variability with the prescriptive nature of norms? Part of the answer lies in the fact that norms are *general* entities which regulate future behaviour. They belong with thirdness not secondness, therefore they cannot fully determine translation events as mechanical action–reaction would. Their mode of existence is an indefinite and conditional future (or ‘would-be’, eg. CP 8.305, 1909) and their form is ‘One would do X if Y were the case and if one had purpose Z’.

Another feature of habits is consistent with the observation that translation norms change in time and through space. Norms are by no means infallible and immutable. In fact, when experience or changing conditions invalidate a certain norm, this will be replaced by a new one. For instance, the advent of computers is a veritable revolution in the profession. Established translation precepts like 'read the whole text before you start translating' are becoming simply impossible to follow if your source is a web site that gets regularly updated. In cases like these, the concerted search for alternative solutions will eventually result in habit-change and a new norm (cf. CP 5.476, 1907). Finally, I would like to draw a distinction between translation's elusive first qualities and norms/habits. The former make translation possible, the latter make it viable. Most of the time we spend translating, we enact existing habits. This makes the work of the translator feasible, because we don't have to establish new habits every time we start a new project (cf. Stecconi 1994: 174).

4.3.3 Foundation

So far we have seen T-semiosis in its secondness and thirdness aspects—ie, as an actual event and the norms that regulate it. Both translation events and norms have been widely covered in translation studies literature. It is now time to reap the real benefit of my strategy of investigation and plunge into firstness. Assuming T-semiosis is one, identifiable entity albeit of giant size, it should be possible to see what its firstness is like. I propose to use the term *Foundation* for it. Foundation, events and norms are the three modes of being of T-semiosis and constitute a One–Two–Three series.

Without the Foundation we could not intuitively see that people operating under radically different translation norms still do the same thing. In this respect, the hunt for translation concepts I referred to above would not be possible at all without a general and vague idea of T-semiosis. Like all firstness, the Foundation is not a common denominator made of translation events. Empirical analysis will not allow us to describe the Foundation; in fact the reverse applies: the Foundation allows us to see certain events as instances of T-semiosis. Therefore, I'm not claiming that the

Foundation *by itself* identifies T-semiosis, nor—God forbid—that it is its essence. Translation's Foundation, events, and norms are held together by an irreducible, trivalent relation. In particular, translation events are regulated by norms which in turn rise from the Foundation. The Foundation is thus a promising place where to search for the conditions to translation in general.

4.4 *Three characters*

What can the Foundation of T-semiosis be like? Peirce has variously associated firstness to quality, spontaneity, chance, feeling, and quality of feeling (cf. Debrock 1998). Clearly, firstnesses are simple, indistinct, and vague ideas. Subjectively, it can be the peculiar sensation that translators experience when they are at work. These feelings are worth exploring, but they belong with the phenomenology of translation and I will leave them for another day. Here I am observing T-semiosis from a logical angle, not a psychological one. Because T-semiosis stands for a very complex entity indeed, its Foundation—the 'quality of translation in general'—can only be grasped by a complex idea. I will start exploring it reprising an insight by Cosculluela already appeared in 3.9 above:

This idea of translation from one sign into another and so on *ad infinitum* encompasses the different meanings that the term *translation* can cover. Regardless of the context, this idea is always present, omnipresent, or underlying: the qualitative possibility of mediation, that is what the firstness of translation is. (Cosculluela 2003: 121).

The author identifies the general possibility of translation in mediation: "The mediation is basically comparable to the third element in Peirce's triadic sign" (Ibid.). I agree that mediation is part of translation's firstness: mediation is always there, underlying translation regardless of practical context and norms. I also agree that, in general, the idea of mediation is closer to thirdness. Examples in Peirce's writings and semiotic literature abound (eg.: "Thirdness, in the sense of the category, is the same as mediation", CP 1.328, 1903). However, if it is true that mediation is a regulative conception that contributes to the possibility of translation, more characters apart from

mediation should be found that specify the Foundation of T-semiosis. Difference and similarity are the candidates I propose. For the moment, I have to ask you to take these characters as working hypotheses. I will devote the next sections to illustrate what they are like. *Similarity*, *difference* and *mediation* are another One–Two–Three series and, together, they represent the Foundation; ie, the firstness of translation.

4.4.1 Similarity

Because translation is often seen as the paragon of similarity, the two notions have become almost interchangeable. However, as I stated earlier, I am using semiosis to explain translation not the other way round. So I will draw a line on the ground and abide by the one-way sign I put up. Similarity is the most basic yet the most intractable condition to T-semiosis because if you look hard enough for an appropriate respect or ground, you will find that everything is similar to everything else (cf. Eco 1994, esp. Ch. 2). Yet, positing similarity as a condition of translation already restricts the field; it means that *one could not logically speak of translation without assuming some reference to similarity*. On the level of particulars, this means that translators use their notion of similarity to find or generate equivalent relations between target and source signs. In those cases where established relations are unsatisfactory, “using inferences of the abductive kind, the translator *makes* the two elements equivalent” (Stecconi 1994: 171). On a general level, it means that T-semiosis aims at producing signs that are similar to other signs organised in a source text (cf. Pym 1992, esp. 37–50).

What makes the notion of similarity intractable is its vagueness; yet the character is fecund and productive precisely because of this. In my model, similarity has no determinate content; it is indifferent to the existent relations of equivalence that hold in the world of experience and to the historically determined norms of equivalence. Peirce called ideas like these *may-be*’s: “That mere *quality*, or suchness, is not in itself an occurrence, as seeing a red object is; it is a mere may-be” (CP 1.304, 1904). In my model, similarity is a potentiality patiently awaiting for individuals and

communities to come along and determine it as they engage in translation. When they do, in time equivalence norms or habits will emerge. These norms involve relations between individual signs—eg, French *courriel* becomes equivalent to ‘email’. They also involve what entire communities mean by equivalence in the first place. The best example I know of the latter is the debate over equivalence in the community of translation scholars (cf. Snell–Hornby 1995; an overall survey and critique in Pym 2000). These determinations are based on and are logically successive to the character of similarity; in fact *the similarity character makes equivalence norms possible*. This precludes the possibility to use empirical analysis of equivalence relations and norms to arrive at an account of the similarity character.

4.4.2 Difference

The character of difference is much more intuitive, because it is ultimately anchored to existing events. The example I am giving below, for instance, points to the existence of a barrier of incomprehensibility between two people who want to interact with each other. However, this character, as it is represented in the Foundation of translation, is the mere possibility of such barrier. A second feature of the character of difference is as follows. The different forms of interaction that—say—the Chinese and Italians use within their respective communities are arguably there before anyone can imagine that a translator can negotiate them. Therefore, this character refers to the process in which a pre-semiotic gap is brought inside T-semiosis. When this happens, the gap is brought in a triadic relation with the other characters of the Foundation and the unpleasant physical experience of bumping against language (and other) barriers turns into something more manageable.

I would like to illustrate what I mean by difference using an almost autobiographical story. An Italian professor is in Beijing to attend a conference. He is visiting the famous Night Market along Donganmen, a street in the city centre lined by a long row of pushcarts selling food every evening from 6 to 9 p.m. The professor notices that one food stall sells something like fried spaghetti, but

the food looks like nothing he's ever seen before. He needs to know what it is before he can bring himself to taste it. He does not speak a word of Chinese and the street vendor knows no western language. He being Italian, he tries to ask 'what is this?' with his hands. The vendor smiles, puts three pieces of the deep-fried stuff in a foam container, and punches the price on a calculator. There the professor has a very real notion that he is heading towards a brick wall. 'No, no!' he says in English this time, 'I want to know what this is before I put it in my mouth'. The vendor smiles knowingly and keys in a lower price. The professor knows he has finally hit the wall. He is about to walk away when one of the conference organisers sees him from across the street. She walks over, talks to the two men and the mysterious foodstuff turns out to be egg and flour mixed with shrimp and crab paste. The Italian professor finds it delicious.

The story shows that *reference to difference is a condition for translation to occur*. Let me picture the two men as standing on opposite sides of a *fold* raised in the smooth surface of the semiosphere. I invite you to think of it as a crease on cloth or a ridge on a sheet of paper when you fold it. The fold between semiotic systems is the most tangible element to which the Foundation points. This conception encompasses Hermans' "definition of translation as a verbal representation of an anterior text across an intelligibility barrier" (Schäffner 1999: 79), but is broader than that. How many folds could you see between the professor and the food-vendor? Language was one, of course; but the two men also acted according to different scripts: the vendor wrongly believed the professor was haggling. And the unfamiliar food was ultimately the highest barrier. This means that language barriers are the main but not the only folds in the semiosphere. Translation-like operations are also required to overcome other folds in the fabric of communication, such as those created by the participants' perceptions or attitudes, by semiotic systems other than verbal language, by the materiality of communication channels, etc.

I am wary of talking about difference in terms of folds because it reifies my discourse. In fact, folds may be existent (dynamical) objects out there in the world, but all I can get to know about them depends on their semiotised reflection (immediate object) in the character of difference. Thus,

should I remain agnostic about their reality? It seems I can only suspect there is something out there which I call a fold, and hope the sign in my mind that represents it is not an illusion. On the other hand, my initial feeling of bumping against a fold can be confirmed by further experience and by the agreement of others. When this happens, I can be reasonably certain that folds are real, because only real entities can produce impressions that stand the double test of pragmatic confirmation and social agreement (Hookway 2002: 47 and 229). At the same time, I will never be absolutely certain, because all the conclusions I can draw are inherently fallible.

The fold image raises another problem because it makes you think of the professor and the food-vendor standing face to face and throwing mutually mysterious signs at each other. In fact, I believe that communication—including translated communication—is not an event in which signs are shuttled between two or more participants. The sense of ‘communication’ I prefer has nothing to do with transportation or transfer (see 7.2 below); instead, it is closer to the etymological sense of communication as ‘bringing together’. The latter Peirce termed ‘*commens*’ the result of the process in which two minds are brought together and fuse in a sign (Peirce 1977: 196–7). In spite of the mesmerising metaphors we use to talk about translation, when I translate I have no evidence or perception of anything moving.¹¹ In fact, shuttling information or meaning is not the most distinctive aspect of T-semiosis. Perhaps, instead of ‘fold’ I should use the image of a trough or ridge in which minds get together and participate in the growth of signs on both sides. The growth is not random, of course, and it will be the task of the next character to give it a purposeful direction.

¹¹ For a historical overview of translation tropes, cf. Hermans and Stecconi 2002; for an intriguing linguistic approach of the transfer trope, cf. Reddy 1979.

4.4.3 Mediation

I will use another real-life example to describe the character of mediation. It is the story of what happens when T-semiosis is jeopardised by irresponsible semiotic behaviour. The example is from negotiation interpreting, a form of communication in which the translator is physically in the middle of a conversation. Let us imagine the simplest pattern: two business-people sit across the table and the translator is between them. Now, suppose one businesswoman, Ann, who is not used to talking through an interpreter, addresses the translator directly with a remark. She may ask something like ‘Barbara, what does he mean by that?’. The conversation immediately grinds to a halt. Barbara would tell Ann to refrain from talking to her directly, she would answer her question, then she would turn to the other guy—Carlos—and explain the incident. During all this time, Carlos is wondering if something fishy is going on, because he doesn’t understand Ann and Barbara when they talk to each other. Why does this event short-circuit the flow of communication? Because the moment Barbara is addressed directly, she must speak for herself. The magic is broken; it will take her some time before she can again *speak on behalf* of the utterer. There is no translation if the target sign does not ‘speak on behalf’ of the source sign.

‘Speaking on behalf’ points to what is perhaps the most fundamental function of all signs; ie, their general fitness to mediate:

[S]uppose we look up the word *homme* in a French dictionary; we shall find opposite to it the word *man*, which, so placed, represents *homme* as representing the same two-legged creature which *man* itself represents. By a further accumulation of instances, it would be found that every comparison requires, besides the related thing, the ground, and the correlate, also a *mediating representation which represents the relate to be a representation of the same correlate which this mediating representation itself represents*. Such a mediating representation may be termed an *interpretant*, because it fulfils the office of an interpreter, who says that a foreigner says the same thing which he himself says (CP 1.553 from Peirce’s famous “On a New List of Categories” of 1867).

We have already seen part of this passage in 2.2.3 above; its implication is that T-semiosis could not happen if the target sign were not seen as an interpretant of the source sign and, therefore, as 'saying the same thing'. I agree with Eco (Eco 2003a: 9) that all the terms are hopelessly vague, but vagueness is what you would expect from a first character (see Ch. 6 for a full discussion).

The representative character of T-semiosis has been remarked by several authors. Brian Mossop defined a translator as a person "X who reports in writing to C what A has written to B" (Mossop 1983: 246); Vilen Kommissarov, re-opening the debate on Toury's notion of 'assumed translation', wrote "a text in the target language designed to serve as a plenipotentiary representative of the source text [...]" (Kommissarov 1996: 370; see 1.1 above). More recently, Petrilli defined translation as reported speech disguised as direct speech (Petrilli 2003c: 22; see 3.11 above) and Andrew Chesterman stated that:

The notion of "translation" is also fuzzy. Let's assume it includes both product and process, and also interpreting. We only need a working definition, so let's say that a translation (product) is a text in one language (target language) that *counts as another text* in another language (source language) for some purpose (Chesterman 2003, italics added).

I take this to mean that if a text does not 'count as another text' across a language barrier it cannot be regarded as a translation under any circumstances. Finally, a consequence of this state of affairs is that two voices must always be present in a translated text or utterance: a reporting voice and a reported voice. Both voices are always present, yet each must remain absolutely distinct from the other. Theo Hermans and Giuliana Schiavi pointed out this fact in narratological terms (Hermans 2002: 11; Hermans 1996; Schiavi 1996).

In sum, it seems that there is a growing consensus around the fact that translations somehow 'stand in' for other texts and signs. From a semiotic perspective, it is easy to see this fact as one of the necessary and interlocked conditions to T-semiosis. In this respect, I would like to point out that *speaking on behalf* implies the existence of two distinct signs. In effect, T-semiosis is second-degree semiosis; one can translate only a sign or a text that is the outcome of some other identifiable

semiosis. The ‘otherness’ is captured by the difference character. *Speaking on behalf* also implies that the distinct signs have something relevant in common, otherwise the representative function would not be fulfilled. This is captured by the similarity character. So, as in all Peircean triads, mediation presupposes difference and similarity.

4.5 Triadicity

Mediation, difference, and similarity are thus the three characters of the Foundation of translation: together, *they are the existential conditions to T-semiosis*. The Foundation, in turn, should never be considered in isolation but as part of a larger triad that comprises translation events and norms as well. The components of the larger triad co-operate and are directed towards a common goal. Semiotic conditions, existent events, and general norms jointly contribute to make translation what it is. An observer would be able to tell which events are translation events and which are not only with reference to *all* these dimensions. This co-operation is required also on metaphysical grounds. Let us imagine a world where there were no translation norms. The denizens of that world would regard certain events as translation but their judgement would be more like a knee-jerk reaction. They would know what a translation looks like, more or less, but they would have no way to identify it in general terms. An external observer would say that in that norm-less world T-semiosis is undecidable and would conclude that all writing is translating and none is. Now, let us imagine another world without translation events. This is the world before Babel: the Foundation would be a pure, unexpressed potentiality—a may-be—and no translation norms would have emerged yet. Finally, let us imagine a world in which the Foundation itself did not exist. I cannot push my imagination to describe it; it would imply, in growing degrees of degeneracy, no conception of mediation between different semiotic systems, no conception of such difference, and finally no conception of similarity. This unimaginable world would not be able to sustain life, let alone translation.

4.6 *Vagueness and generality*

The main feature of the Foundation is vagueness, that of events is determination, and that of norms is generality (cf. CP 5.450, 1905). Leaving aside events—which should be intuitive enough—let us contrast the vagueness of the Foundation with the generality of norms. Here is what Peirce had to say.

Logicians have too much neglected the study of vagueness, not suspecting the important part it plays in mathematical thought. It is the antithetical analogue of generality. A sign is objectively general, in so far as, leaving its effective interpretation indeterminate, it surrenders to the interpreter the right of completing the determination for himself. ‘Man is mortal.’ ‘What man?’ ‘Any man you like.’ A sign is objectively vague, in so far as, leaving its interpretation more or less indeterminate, it reserves for some other possible sign or experience the function of completing the determination. ‘This month,’ says the almanac—oracle, ‘a great event is to happen.’ ‘What event?’ ‘Oh, we shall see. The almanac doesn’t tell that.’ (CP 5.505, 1905).

The quotation is important in several respects. First of all, it says we should make no apology for introducing vague conceptions into our arguments. Vagueness has unparalleled productive power. Abduction, for instance, is a vague analogy of like with like and is the only means whereby we can bring qualitatively new ideas into the world (cf. CP 5.171, 1903). Secondly, the quotation indicates two ways in which we can resolve the indeterminacy of general signs and vague signs, respectively. A general sign is left to the interpreter to complete. For instance, translation norms are general signs. A faithfulness norm is enacted and determined every time an Italian translator in the European commission writes *questioni di genere* for ‘gender issues’. In contrast, the indeterminacy of vague signs, like the Foundation’s characters, is resolved by other signs or events. Now, this is crucial. Let us take the character of similarity as our example. The Foundation knows there is no T-semiosis without reference to similarity but it is agnostic as to the kind and degree of similarity that will be regarded as proper and fitting for translation by a community at a given time. To paraphrase Peirce, ‘What similarity?’ ‘Oh, we shall see. The Foundation doesn’t tell that.’ This accounts for the

observable variety of translation norms but, at the same time, it suggests that their range cannot be infinitely broad. As Toury put it (see 3.4 above), these characters don't give answers, they ask questions; but they ask *certain* questions, not just any question.

4.7 *Similarity and identity*

Comparing similarity and identity is another interesting way to contrast the Foundation and the norms of translation. Peirce drew a sharp distinction between similarity and identity. This is surprising because we tend to see identity as an extreme case of similarity or equivalence, indeed as perfect similarity. In fact, the difference is not a matter of degree but of mode of existence: similarity belongs with firstness whereas identity belongs with thirdness. Let me recall one of Peirce's classifications of signs: "Signs are divisible by three trichotomies; first, according as the sign in itself is a mere quality, is an actual existent, or is a general law ..." (CP 2.243, c. 1903). This division produces qualisigns, sinsigns and legisigns (see 2.10 above). Again, I will take sinsigns for granted and focus on the other two classes. Peirce claims that, because they belong to different categories, legisigns have identity and qualisigns don't. I can illustrate this with an example.

I often use voice recognition software. Before I could use the program, I had to 'train' it so that it could take dictation from me. The training module includes a program that learns how to match the tone of my speech to a list of words stored in a database. In effect, the software learns how to correlate input in which the first character is predominant to second characters. Now, if someone else dictates to my machine, the rate of recognition falls dramatically. This is because my program developed uniquely to convert the qualisign of *my* speech (the 'tone' in the tone-token-type triad, cf. CP 6.537, c.1901). Even a speech-qualisign very close to mine would already be another qualisign altogether, and the program would fail to recognise it. "Instead of identity, [the qualisign] has great similarity, and cannot differ much without being called quite another qualisign" (CP 8.334, 1904). In contrast, a legisign has identity: "&, *and*, and the sound are all one word" (Ibid.). This means that a number of markings, soundwaves and other actual occurrences (like the

electronic states inside the belly of a computer) can all refer to *the same* legisign no matter how different their physical manifestations are. Let us apply this crucial distinction to my model. The Foundation regarded in itself has always been a vague qualisign. Even before Babel and the confusion of tongues (or lips, to be precise), the Foundation was there as pure potentiality. To describe what it was like at the time, one would have to use a lot of may-be's. There may be different languages; there may be some form of similarity between these languages; there may be a special form of mediation to negotiate the differences. The moment God confounded the lips of men, this pure possibility acquired determination; translation events appeared and, in time, norms stabilised.

Finally, legisigns and qualisigns are general and cannot enter our world of experience as they are. To manifest themselves, they need to be embodied by sinsigns. This time the example is from phonetics: nobody has ever heard the phoneme /ŋ/ but only its various renditions, as in someone's pronunciation of the word 'going'. /ŋ/ is a legisign; 'going', when uttered, includes its sinsign. In my model, the distinction between similarity and identity helps us understand another difference between the Foundation and translation norms. The Foundation enables one to guess or suspect that a stretch of semiosis may be similar to T-semiosis under the respects described by its three characters. In contrast, when one ascertains that certain semioses comply with a prevalent set of translation norms, one can positively identify them as translation events. Let me repeat that in real life translating always implies the interplay of Foundation, events and norms. However, the two processes—from the Foundation up and from norms down—although concurrent, are always distinct. One can picture Foundation, events and norms as a three-rung ladder: the middle rung is made of individual, tangible and discrete events; the bottom and top rungs are general, intangible and continuous. We can have perceptual experience only of the translation events that embody Foundation and norms. Norms above and the Foundation beneath escape direct empirical verification and are accessible only through speculation.

5 Relevance Theory and T-Semiosis

5.1 *The need to bring semiotics down to earth*

Understanding how signs work was one of Peirce's central intellectual quests throughout his life. He showed that any conceivable representation worked thanks to the interplay of its three constituent parts: an object, a sign or representamen, and its interpretant. These components result from speculation, not from empirical observation of—say—people engaged in conversation. Therefore one should not attribute tangible or anthropomorphic characters to the three constituents of the sign; in fact, the trivalent relation between these parts *is* the sign (Deely 2003). As a consequence, objects need not be definite things out there in the world, and interpretants need not be in people's minds, let alone in the minds of those who receive signs or to whom signs are addressed. At the same time, one should avoid falling into the opposite trap. Focussing too much on the logical side of semiosis and disregarding people's actual behaviour is just as misguided. In his writings, Peirce consistently preferred to look at representations from a logical viewpoint and played down their use in real life. Today, we should take it upon ourselves to integrate and update his strategy of investigation. I can see at least two reasons why this would be particularly important for translation studies. Firstly, because translating is mostly about signs that were already meant as real instances of communication. Obviously, this is not all there is to it; but it should be beyond dispute that T-semiosis is second-degree semiosis. Secondly, it is a fact that current mainstream literature in translation studies has much more to do with actual communication than with the logic of representation; it would be difficult to build a persuasive discourse that did not build on this tradition. Whereas semiotics can conceivably be interested in pure speculation and in processes involving nonhuman animals, plants, and ecosystems, it is advisable that translation semiotics finds a better footing in actual human semioses.

This is the main reason behind the present chapter, which will be devoted to T-semiosis in action. Let me recall the outer shell of my model: the discourse on translation can be articulated across three general categories: translation events, the Foundation, and translation norms. The latter are the views and expectations about translation and translating that communities hold true at certain points in time and space. Norms guide and constrain acts of translating, and thanks to them people can interpret, assess, and regulate actual translation events. As to the Foundation, it is the category that spells out the logico-semiotic conditions without which we could not be talking of translation in the first place. Both these categories mainly include general ideas. In contrast, the category of translation events comprises particular entities such as translated texts, their originals, relations between actual instances of these, relations between translated and non-translated texts in the target environment, acts of translating, etc. I hasten to add that the category of events is not cut off from the others; translation events are logically delimited by the characters in the Foundation and regulated by the prevalent norms in the community. My three categories are linked to each other in the usual, triadic fashion.

5.2 *The continuity between Relevance theory and semiotics*

Given the speculative bias of interpretive semiotics, I need extra help to see how T-semiosis works in practice. Relevance theory will provide such help. Relevance theory is a major recent development in the understanding of language and human communication based on a pragmatic and cognitive approach. It is associated with the work of Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 2004) and it has generated a large body of literature (cf. the bibliography maintained online by Francisco Yus (Yus 2005), which also includes a section on translating and interpreting). The nexus between Relevance theory and translation has already been explored by other authors, after the pioneering work of Ernst-August Gutt (Gutt 2000a, 2000b). I will illustrate his work in 5.4 below; here, I would like to show the continuity between Peirce's semiotics and some basic assumptions of Relevance theory.

The following quote can give you a rough idea of Relevance theory's approach to the study of signs:

In other words, verbal communication proper begins when the speaker is recognised not just as talking, not even just as communicating by talking, but as saying something to someone. Most utterances do this, of course, and an adequate account of verbal communication must explain why (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 178).

The similarity between 'saying something to someone' and Peirce's conception of the sign is striking. In a letter to Lady Welby of 1908, Peirce wrote:

I define a Sign as anything which is so determined by something else, called its Object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect I call its Interpretant, that the latter is thereby mediately determined by the former (Peirce 1977: 80–81).

From a Peircean perspective, 'Saying' corresponds to the sign, 'something' corresponds to the object, and 'to someone' corresponds to the person in which the sign produces its effect. However, there are differences too, as revealed by the next sentence in the same letter: "My insertion of "upon a person" is a sop to Cerberus, because I despair of making my own broader conception understood" (Id.: 81). What does Peirce's broader conception include? According to Braga (Braga 2003) it includes his theory of the interpretant, which is largely independent of the individual mind where interpretation takes place. She adds:

In order to retain the full potentiality of Peirce's definition of the sign, we have to consider it in its most abstract and generic level [...]. Since the three elements, sign, object, and interpretant, in themselves, or better, in their existential nature, may belong to various orders of reality, as single objects, general classes, fictions, mental representations, physical impulses, human actions, organic activities, or natural laws, what constitutes the sign relation in its logical form is the particular way in which this triad is bound together (Id.: 46).

I fully agree with Braga. She confirms Deely's insight, which I mentioned earlier, that the triadic relation is the sign. But because this chapter is about communication among real people, part of the full potentiality of Peirce's definition will be sacrificed.

I can now specify the basic difference in outlook between Peirce's semiotics and Relevance theory: actual human communication draws the outer boundary of Relevance theory, whereas it is only a province in Peirce's world. Sperber and Wilson maintain that 'communication proper' revolves around a speaker and an audience. In contrast, Peirce involves people in semiosis only with great reluctance, because limiting our investigation to actual human communication would also limit our understanding of how signs work in general. In spite of this difference, many assumptions in Relevance theory make perfect sense in Peircean-semiotic terms. In fact, I think they occupy a province of general semiotics. A similar relation has been noticed by Givón and Pietarinen (Givón 2005; Pietarinen forth.; cf. also Pietarinen 2004). Givón writes that "Charles Sanders Peirce is generally acknowledged as the Godfather of modern pragmatism, with insights ranging all over the pragmatic agenda" (Givón 2005: 26). As to Pietarinen, he also connects Peirce to contemporary pragmatics. Long before Relevance theory—and Grice—Peirce's pragmatism already considered the context of an utterance as a logical condition without which it would be impossible to speak of the utterance's meaning. The core of Peirce's pragmatism is expressed in a maxim that is:

intended to furnish a method for the analysis of concepts [such as] the rational part of the purport of a word. [...] The method prescribed in the maxim is to trace out in the imagination the conceivable practical consequences, — that is, the consequences for deliberate, self-controlled conduct, — of the affirmation or denial of the concept; and the assertion of the maxim is that herein lies the **whole** of the purport of the word, the **entire** concept (CP 8.191, 1904).

This method—and the philosophical system it involves—establishes a necessary link between the general meaning of a sign and the possible contexts where the sign may be actualised. However,

one question remains unresolved: how can one circumscribe, within the whole world of experience, the contexts on which the sign may have a bearing? This is the main reason why Pietarinen takes an interest in Relevance theory; because—he writes—it is an attempt “to capture the notion of relevance in communicative situations in terms of contextual effects” (Pietarinen forth.). He goes on to affirm that Relevance theory “may be thought of as an instance of Peirce’s Pragmatic Maxim” (Ibid.). In this light, the relevance of a piece of information depends “on (i) what the practical consequences of accommodating the chosen piece of information introduced in communication are, and (ii) what will ensue in actually using that piece in further cycles of discourse” (Ibid.). Of course, ‘practical consequences’ and ‘usage’ need not become actual experiences or behaviour; they need only be actualisable. Also ‘practical consequences’ should be understood as a concept’s ability to modify our habits of thought and behaviour, not our actual thought and behaviour. Their mode of being is always conditional upon certain circumstances and always projected towards the future—to use Peirce’s term, always ‘a would-be’.

Let me put forward another argument in favour of regarding Relevance theory’s central assumptions as special cases of Peirce’s theory of signs. Both semiotics and Relevance theory move away from signs and codes to focus on sign reception. For Sperber and Wilson, communication proper does not begin until the speaker’s intention to communicate some information ‘is recognised’ by a second agent. In Peirce too, ‘an effect is produced’ in the mind of the interpreter. In general terms, this is where the two theories overlap more clearly. Semiosis (a term that includes communication but is not limited to it) cannot be properly understood unless one shifts from signs regarded as object-like entities to sign-action: the acts or events of producing and interpreting them. Relevance theory, on its part, insists on the passage from a ‘code theory’ of communication to an ‘inferential theory’ of communication. This passage is crucial and defines the very intellectual agenda of the field. In Peircean semiotics, unlike linguistics, there would hardly be room for this debate between code and inference models. A semiotician would not doubt for a second that all semiosis is inferential, including communication between humans.

I have already noted above that both theories need three terms to define communication: i) something (a sign) that is fit to communicate, ii) something else that is the object of communication, and iii) a subject that interprets the sign as standing for the object. Another important area of overlap between Relevance theory and interpretive semiotics is that for both theories the three terms *together* are the minimum requirement for communication to take place. Please recall Sperber and Wilson's expression quoted above: the speaker is recognised 'not just as talking, not even just as communicating by talking, but as saying something to someone'. The informative and communicative intentions are distinct only in the analysis. In the communication act, they are two parts of one continuum. In fact, the parts of the continuum are three, because one should add the act of interpreting the stimulus used in the act of communication. It is easy to see that there would be no semiosis if there were no object of communication. It is equally easy to understand that there would be no semiosis if there were no sign that stood for the object. But the passage from code to inference or from sign to sign-action makes a third condition necessary: there would be no semiosis if an interpreter did not process the message. The success of T-semiosis and of semiosis in general crucially depends on the interpreter getting the proper 'sign-object relation'. Let me explain why.

Peirce developed an elaborate theory—called the theory of the interpretant—to describe what happens in the interpretation of signs. I have briefly referred to it earlier under 2.6. Here, I would like to analyse a crucial aspect. To do so, I will quote from a letter Peirce wrote to William James in 1909:

[T]he Interpretant [...] is created by the Sign; but not by the Sign *quâ* member of whichever of the Universes it belongs to; but it has been created by the Sign in its capacity of bearing the determination by the Object. It is created in a Mind (how far this mind must be real we shall see). All that part of the understanding of the Sign which the Interpreting Mind has needed collateral observation for is outside the Interpretant. I do not mean by "collateral observation" acquaintance with the system of signs. What is so gathered is not COLLATERAL. It is on the contrary the prerequisite for getting any idea signified by the sign. But by collateral observation, I mean previous acquaintance with what the sign denotes. Thus if the Sign be the sentence 'Hamlet was mad,' to understand what this

means one must know that men are sometimes in that strange state; one must have seen madmen or read about them; and it will be all the better if one specifically knows (and need not be driven to presume) what Shakespeare's notion of insanity was. All that is collateral observation and is no part of the Interpretant. But to put together the different subjects as the sign represents them as related—that is the main of the Interpretant—forming (Peirce 1992–1998, vol. 2: 493–4).

This passage confirms that the interpretant is directly produced by the sign, but because the sign is determined by the object, it follows that the object indirectly determines an interpretant for itself. The quote also mentions in passing that the interpreting mind needs not be that of an individual. We have already seen both ideas earlier. What is new for us is Peirce's distinction between three kinds of knowledge: i) the knowledge of what Relevance-theoretic jargon may call contextual assumptions, ii) knowledge of the relevant sign system, and iii) the knowledge one derives exclusively from the interpretation of the sign. The three-way distinction has the function of delimiting the scope of the third part: the knowledge that pertains to the interpretant. A positive description follows this specification by subtraction, and this is based on the fact that signs establish connections between entities in the world by representing them from a certain ground or viewpoint. Peirce claims that the interpretant mainly includes information on the object *as is reflected in the sign*. This amounts to a principle of selection, because it excludes other ways of representing the relations among things. Tropes are particularly good to show this principle of selection and how essential it is for signs to work. If you say that 'John fought for his promotion like a lion' it would hardly be proper to infer that he eventually ate his boss raw. The stock figure puts together John and lions under some respects, not all. These will probably include courage, determination, and strength, but not feeding habits. This is one sense in which an interpreter should strive to get the proper 'sign-object relation': he should strive to understand *under which respect* the sign represents its object.

Another sense has to do with Peirce's pragmatism (or pragmaticism) which, I repeat, "consists in holding that the purport of any concept is its conceived bearing upon our conduct" (CP 5.442,

1905). In a sustained attempt at clearing this central area of his philosophy, Peirce wrote in 1907: “For the proper significate outcome of a sign, I propose the name, the interpretant of the sign” (CP 5.473). So, interpretants are ‘proper significate outcomes’ or, as he wrote elsewhere, ‘effects’ (eg, in CP 5.475). That interpretants are described as ‘effects’ is consistent with the pragmatic approach; but what does it mean that they are *proper* effects? We have seen one account of this in the appendix to chapter 3. Here I would add an answer which—as is often the case with Peirce—comes from etymology. In Latin, *propius* meant “one’s own”. Vincent Colapietro explained it well:

The Interpretant is not any result generated by a sign. Something functioning as a sign might produce effects unrelated to itself as a sign; for example, a fire indicating the presence of the survivors of an airplane crash might set a forest ablaze. The forest fire would be an incidental result and thus not an interpretant of the sign calling for help (or indicating the whereabouts of the survivors) (Colapietro 1993: 122).

Finally, there is a third and more practical sense of ‘getting the proper sign–object relation’, and this is when we say that two people have understood each other well. From this angle, one can translate ‘proper interpretation’ as: “the interpreter is giving the sign–object relation a meaning that seems right from the interpreter’s point of view” (Hermans 2005, personal communication). The reason for the extremely cautious expression is that an inference model makes it very hard to be *certain* that an audience’s meaning will overlap and eventually coincide with the speaker’s meaning. In effect, an inference–based semiotics like Peirce’s effectively rules out the possibility of attaining certainty altogether. The fact remains, however, that we have been doing decidedly well as a species thanks to the high rate of success of language and our other sign systems. We often seem to understand the world and each other very well indeed. The seeming contradiction between the theoretical impossibility of ensuring perfect understanding and the observable rate of success of human communication can be explained on a structural level using the high degree of redundancy of our communication systems. Redundancy has been noted by information theory and genetics alike and is thought to regulate transmission of information and minimize the disruptive effects of

chance errors. On a different level, Noam Chomsky is also fond of using the biological trope of ‘language organ’: “It is hard to avoid the conclusion that a part of the human biological endowment is a specialized “language organ,” the faculty of language” (Chomsky, Belletti, and Rizzi 2002: 85). If he’s right, then one would not expect language and other semiotic systems to be perfect devices that produce certainty because perfect systems do not change and evolve. At any given moment in evolution, organic systems strive to find optimal states, given the environmental constraints and opportunities of that moment. The problem with code theories of communication (as opposed to inferential theories) is precisely that they entertain the notion of perfect communication. I would reject the notion of perfect communication and cognition except as the most general and abstract *would-be*, an ‘indefinite hope’ that gives the life of signs a sense of direction (see 2.12 above).

To sum up, if the triadic relation between sign, object, and interpretant defines the sign in general, ‘saying something to someone’ is a clear and concise expression of the impact this relation has in human communication. The next section will take stock of this fact to briefly present Relevance theory and discuss some intriguing points. Then I will present Gutt’s work. Finally, I will turn to my own, looking for ways to use Relevance–theory insights within my semiotic framework to produce a pragmatic–semiotic account of intentions and agency in actual translating.

5.3 A critical sketch of Relevance theory

Relevance theory is a theory of communication based on people’s ability to *infer* the meaning of signs produced by a communicator. Although Sperber and Wilson privilege verbal utterances as the main input of this inferential process, they often use nonverbal signs to highlight that all communication is contextual communication. Their examples include a broken blow–dryer Mary left around for Peter to fix, an empty glass in the line of sight waiting for someone to pour more wine in, etc. There really is no essential distinction between verbal and nonverbal signs (here I use the term ‘sign’ as a superordinate term to include utterances, texts, etc.). Sperber and Wilson’s account of communication starts with a speaker who intends to convey information to an audience.

To do so, she¹² produces a stimulus designed to modify the cognitive environment of the audience in certain ways. Thanks to this clue, he will recognise the speaker's intention to communicate and will identify the information. In this sense, the stimulus is *ostensive*: ie, a behaviour that would be unexplainable if it were not a signal of communicative intention. The behaviour is thus described as *manifestly intentional*, and the communication *ostensive communication*. In essence, the communicator behaves in a way as to give evidence that she wants the audience to make a certain inference. The audience need only attribute two intentions to the communicator: i) the intention to pass on some information, and ii) the intention that she intends to do so. The former is called *informative intention*, the latter *communicative intention*. There is no risk of an infinite regression here, because communicative intentions are self-referential, not iterated.

Relevance theory is a post-Gricean theory of communication:

Relevance theory may be seen as an attempt to work out in detail one of Grice's central claims: that an essential feature of most human communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is the expression and recognition of intentions [...]. In developing this claim, Grice laid the foundations for an inferential model of communication, an alternative to the classical code model (Sperber and Wilson 2004: 607).

Years after Grice's seminal works (*Meaning* appeared in 1957), the code model came under attack from other quarters. In 1979 Michael Reddy published a convincing criticism of what he called the 'conduit metaphor' (Reddy 1979). In this paper—which is referred to in the very first footnote of Sperber and Wilson's *Relevance* (Sperber and Wilson 1995, the first edition came out in 1986)—conduit-metaphor views of verbal communication are described as a sort of transfer mechanism whereby a sender deposits information in a sign thanks to a code, the receiver unwraps the sign thanks to an identical copy of the code, and finds the information inside the box more or less as the sender had deposited it. Reddy puts forward an alternative model, called 'the toolmakers paradigm',

¹² I will follow Sperber and Wilson's useful convention of picturing a woman talking to a man in my

where a number of individuals cut off from each other communicate only by exchanging notes containing instructions to construct tools. All the audience can do with these instructions is interpreting them through inferential processes; little or no decoding is involved. The paper also shows that the English language ‘regards itself’ as being based on the conduit metaphor. In effect, the expressions we use to describe language and communication make it difficult for us to change our views. There is no shortage of evidence of how deeply engrained this view still is, especially when translation is involved.

There is no doubt that communication (including translation) involves both encoding–decoding and inference. The next problem therefore is finding a plausible account of their respective roles and relations. Here is a recent position by Sperber and Wilson:

What makes it possible for the hearer to recognise the speaker’s informative intention is that utterances encode logical forms [...] which the speaker has manifestly chosen to provide as input to the hearer’s inferential comprehension process. [...] Although the decoded logical form of an utterance is an important clue to the speaker’s intentions, it is now increasingly recognised that even the explicitly communicated content of an utterance goes well beyond what is linguistically encoded. (Sperber and Wilson 2004: 614–5).

5.3.1 Code v inference

The code component of communication can be compared to the perceptual system of a living organism: it provides the raw material the organism will use to interpret its environment and interact with it. Using Peirce’s existential categories, code–based communication belongs with secondness and accounts for the automatic side of the interactions living beings have with the outer world, each other, and themselves. In contrast, inferential processes belong with thirdness; apart

examples.

from action–reaction events, they also contain an element of chance and a *telos*. Origgi and Sperber seem to be very close to this view. Commenting on an alternative model of communication proposed by Millikan, they wrote: “[it] is a true code model of communication in that it explains communication by the systematic pairing of linguistic stimuli and responses” (Origgi and Sperber 2000: 149). The key phrase is ‘systematic pairing’, which is a hallmark of secondness. The authors also introduce a distinction between what I would call ‘dumb’, dyadic forms of communication and intelligent, triadic systems by comparing the dance of bees and human language. They claim an animal language is a perfect code: “A perfect code is one without ambiguity: each stimulus–type is paired to only one response–type” (Id.: 150), whereas “Human languages are obviously not perfect codes. Typical sentences contain multiple ambiguities” (Ibid.). I agree with Origgi and Sperber when they see one–to–one correspondence as characteristic of the language of bees and of all code–based forms of sign–action. However, ambiguity is not the best tool we can use to draw the line between code–based and inference–based semioses; vagueness, determination, and generality are more fundamental characters. Besides, the distinction needs to be asymmetrical. Let me explain this in detail. Because they are based on one–to–one pairings, semiotic systems based on pure codes are linear; as such, each dyadic relation upon which they are built can be described by a single character, such as the arrow in the following picture.

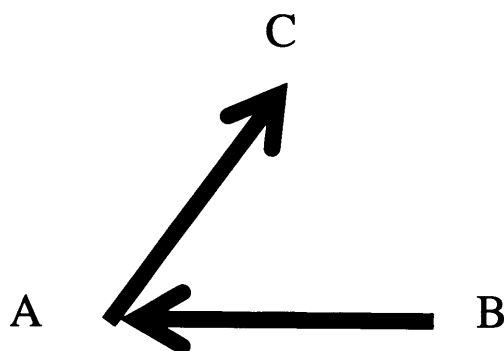
Figure 1



I propose to describe this state of affairs a case of ‘perfect determination’. A good example of perfect determination can be found inside an ordinary computer, where a given input B unfailingly determines a given output A. The determination is perfect because there is a sense in which a processor can never get it wrong. I realise this would look preposterous to anyone who saw her PC

crash and wipe all her data, but those failures are due to a random degeneration of the code or of the tokens used to implement it. Both facts are external to the design of the system. Inference-based semioses, in contrast, add one dimension and become triadic systems; therefore two relations are jointly needed to describe the smallest step. Input B can generate an interpretation C only through the mediation of sign A. This interpretation is regulated by two factors: inherent vagueness in the B–A relation and law-like, general normativity along the A–C relation.

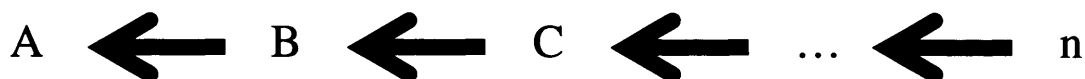
Figure 2



As a consequence, genuine triadic signs, like those humans can use, do not determine their interpretations perfectly, they simply set limits to them. It is clear—as Origgi and Sperber pointed out—that this often produces effects one can describe as ambiguous, but ambiguity is only a consequence of thirdness; in fact, it is its hallmark. This also shows why code- and inference-based systems are radically asymmetrical. The addition of a second dimension should be seen in geometrical terms, a second system is to a third system as a line segment is to a plane figure: the difference is absolute. This becomes clearer when one compares a very complex dyadic system—like chess—to even a simple triadic one—like solving a tiny but fresh translation problem. In January 2003, chess master Garry Kasparov accepted to play a computer again after losing the famous series to IBM-programmed Deep Blue in 1997. Kasparov managed to draw the six-game series amid much controversy. The result confirmed an insight by John von Neumann: “Chess is not a game. Chess is a well-defined form of computation. You may not be able to work out the

answers, but in theory there must be a solution” (quoted in *The Economist* (Anon 1997), cf. also 1913 Zermelo’s Theorem—one of the foundations of game theory—whereby chess is strictly determined). In our terms, chess is a perfect code and playing it requires a form of reasoning and interpretation that does not necessarily involve the manipulation of genuine triadic signs, and hence intelligence. The string of dyadic relations and calculations can be long, but it will always keep within a linear process. In diagrammatic terms, it would be like replicating figure 1 above arbitrarily many times:

Figure 3



Let us now contrast this with the story of how a simple translation problem was solved. Years ago I coordinated a team that was translating the manuals for a software package called Project into Italian. The original manual—written in the US—followed the fictional thread of an engineering firm using the software to construct a golf course. During the planning stages of our work, we wondered whether the fiction would work for an Italian context. Among the many hypotheses tested, we even thought of using the construction of a football stadium as our example (we were near the football world cup finals held in Italy in 1990). Then we realised that golfing was becoming popular in Italy, especially among the class of people who were likely to purchase Project. When we discovered that they were actually constructing a new golf course a few miles away from our own town, the question was settled: we would retain the fiction (full story and comments in Stecconi 1994). Let me highlight one feature in these stories: our decision-making process involved just one step—keeping the original fiction or looking for something else—in contrast, Deep Blue was capable of searching 200 million positions per second. Yet, whereas Deep Blue’s algorithm were perfectly determined by the code of chess, the reasoning of my team of

ordinary translators crucially included *formulating hypotheses*, testing them against their conceivable effects, and adopting the one we liked best as a rule for future behaviour—a habit. This is the core difference between code-based and inference-based semiosis: the former has no room for the phrase ‘what if’ and for habit taking; the latter would not work without them.

All this helps us confirm and refine Origgi and Sperber’s insight: it is true that human languages are not perfect codes because they are not totally dyadic; however, they are not totally triadic either. Human semioses and semiotic systems mix first, second, and third characters in many ways. To limit examples to verbal expressions: ‘all men are mortal’ is predominantly a symbol (third); in the expression ‘look over there’, the deictic is predominantly an index (a second); and in the figure ‘all the world’s a stage’ the vague relation between *world* and *stage* is an icon (part of firstness. See 2.4 and 2.10 above for a fuller discussion).

5.3.2 Cognition

All accounts of semiosis based on inference must solve the problem of the leeway of interpretation. If interpretation always involves an ‘interpretive bet’, (Eco et al. 1992: 63) why do we manage to understand the world and each other so well and so often? In the case of Peirce’s theory of signs the question is even more embarrassing, because a sign’s possible interpretations are as many as the points in a line segment: infinite within a limited range. Here, it is interesting to note how the change in outlook from code to inference affects the questions as well as the answers. In classical models of communication, the surprising fact was that perfect communication could not be achieved at all times; in inferential models the surprise is that communication—albeit imperfect—is achieved so often. (Reddy 1979: 295 already made this point). Again, semiotics and Relevance theory provide strikingly similar answers to this problem. Peirce invoked *lume naturale*:

In this way, general considerations concerning the universe, strictly philosophical considerations, all but demonstrate that if the universe conforms, with any approach to accuracy, to certain highly pervasive laws, and if man’s mind has been developed under

the influence of those laws, it is to be expected that he should have a natural light, or light of nature, or instinctive insight, or genius, tending to make him guess those laws aright, or nearly aright (CP 5.604, 1903).

I should add that the proper meaning of ‘guessing’ here is found in Peirce’s account of scientific reasoning, based on hypothetical thinking or abduction (see CP 3.219, 1880). Sperber and Wilson too refer to evolutionary pressure:

Relevance theory claims that humans do have an automatic tendency to maximise relevance, not because we have a choice in the matter—we rarely do—but because of the way our cognitive systems have evolved. As a result of constant selection pressure towards increasing efficiency, the human cognitive system has developed in such a way that our perceptual mechanisms tend automatically to pick out potentially relevant stimuli, our memory retrieval mechanisms tend automatically to activate potentially relevant assumptions, and our inferential mechanisms tend spontaneously to process them in the most productive way (Sperber and Wilson 2004: 610).

This had led the authors to formulating their:

Cognitive Principle of Relevance

Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 260).

Relevance should be understood here as a highly technical notion described as follows: “According to Relevance theory, an input is relevant to an individual when, and only when, its processing yields [...] positive cognitive effects” (Sperber and Wilson 2004: 608). To the receiver of the input, positive cognitive effects include “answering a question he had in mind, improving his knowledge on a certain topic, settling a doubt, confirming a suspicion, or correcting a mistaken impression” (Ibid.). Although positive cognitive effects are presented as an open set, they are generally described as “a worthwhile difference to the individual’s representation of the world—a true conclusion, for example. False conclusions are not worth having. They are cognitive effects, but not

positive ones” (Ibid.). If this is the benefit of a given input, its cost is what the authors call ‘processing effort’.

Intuitively, the greater the effort of perception, memory and inference required, the less rewarding the input will be to process, and hence the less deserving of our attention. In Relevance-theoretic terms, other things being equal, the greater the processing effort required, the less relevant the input will be (Id.: 609).

The book comes to balance in this simple formula:

Relevance of an input to an individual

- a. Other things being equal, the greater the positive cognitive effects achieved by processing an input, the greater the Relevance of the input to the individual at that time.
- b. Other things being equal, the greater the processing effort expended, the lower the Relevance of the input to the individual at that time (Ibid.).

I have serious reservations about this ‘cost-benefit’ approach to communication. Are we sure people always or typically aim at maximising cognitive effects while minimising processing effort? Sometimes, a communicator will deliberately try to make things difficult for her audience. Sometimes she would do so although she would be perfectly capable of producing easier signs to process. The authors respond to this latter objection specifying that a sign is optimally relevant if and only if it is “compatible with the communicator’s abilities and preferences”.

Presumption of optimal Relevance

- a. The ostensive stimulus is relevant enough to be worth the audience’s processing effort;
- b. It is the most relevant one compatible with communicator’s abilities and preferences (Id. 612).

But the sense of an excessively positivistic position remains. The formulation of these definitions leads one to think of a clear trade-off between cognitive effect and processing effort and of agents

driven by utility maximisation. Things may be otherwise; people often regard communication as an end in itself and as a disinterested pleasure, to use Kant's phrase. We all engage in conversation, letter writing, etc. *also* because we like doing so, *not only* because we need to give evidence of our mental states and maximise cognitive effects. In other words, this means that one should not consider 'processing effort' as a cost all the time; sometimes it is itself a benefit. Humans like to solve problems and like to play problem-solving games for their own sake. So, there is a sense in which the first optimal-Relevance clause bites its tail, because—to some audience at least—processing effort is part of what makes a sign worth processing. Similar difficulties have been remarked by Anthony Pym:

For our purposes [Sperber and Wilson's] shift is unhelpful in itself yet instructive in its difference from Grice. First, it is unhelpful because embedded in an unnecessary dichotomy of communication models; it harps on a speaker's 'intention' that is not necessarily available to anyone nor of immediate value to everyone; and more importantly, it brings with it a series of individualist presuppositions, proposing a psychologist's world peopled by a subject [*sic*] bent on accumulating information, increasing efficiency, and improving their personal knowledge of the world [...]. Sperber and Wilson's subject [...] would seem firmly within the 'buffaloes down by the late' theory of language: men using signs in order to hunt better. The theory offers little space for language as gossip, for exchange as active creator of intentions, for the play through which social relations are established and maintained, over and above the accumulation of relevant information (Pym 2000: 183–184).

This harsh judgement is neither untypical nor surprising. Pym's agenda differs greatly from that of Relevance theory: the former is "looking for some kind of social dimension" (Id.: 184) the latter is apparently focussed on individual interactions. Relevance theory had already received similar criticism from the social sciences, to which its main proponents replied as far back as 1997. In that paper, the authors admit that their focus had been on psychological issues rather than on sociological ones, but—they add—the research agenda of Relevance theory may well change as the field matures. Moreover, they point out that disciplinary boundaries are not cast in stone: "we

would like to help bring about a redefinition of disciplinary boundaries, including those between the cognitive and social sciences, and we see our work as contributing to both domains” (Sperber and Wilson 1997: 145). It can hardly be denied that people communicate to do all the rational things that have been listed above as examples of positive cognitive effects. On the other hand, we also communicate to seduce, deceive, play and do a lot of things with our words that could hardly be described as rational. My point is that the best interest of individuals, of groups, and of the species is served by both classes of behaviour; there is no compelling reason for a sharp distinction between rational and non-rational behaviour on this level.

This is to underscore the cost-benefit logic that underpins Relevance theory and criticise its ‘economic’ character. Here, I would like to elaborate on this criticism following a suggestion by Tirkkonen-Condit (Tirkkonen-Condit 1992: 243–244). Economics, perhaps the most influential rationalist model of human behaviour we have, is changing fast. Over the past few years, mainstream economics—known as neoclassical theory—has come under attack. Competing theories question the fundamental neoclassical assumptions about people’s rational behaviour. Daniel Kahneman, for instance, was awarded the Nobel prize in economics in 2002 for his work on one of these alternative models called ‘prospect theory’. Several studies have showed the limits of *homo economicus* as a model for real-life behaviour. One of these involves New York taxi drivers, which, according to one study (Camerer 2000), decide how long they will work by setting themselves income targets. When they earn enough for the day, they stop. This means that they work more on a slow day than they do on a busy day. However, neoclassical theory would predict they do the opposite, because on busy days their hourly wage-rate would be higher. I am not bringing up these examples to claim that people are not rational, nor am I going to plunge into a sentimental tirade juxtaposing rationality to emotions, poetry, or what have you. I firmly believe that, in general, people know very well what is good for them. In general, they use reason to increase their wellbeing, but neither the definition of one’s wellbeing nor its pursuit need follow rational lines *as we know them*. In other words, who is to blame if the behaviour of New York taxi drivers is not the

one predicted by neoclassical economic theory? It would not be fair to accuse the taxi drivers of being irrational, I would rather suspect that neoclassical theory does not represent their behaviour well enough. In fact, as concerns economics, one may also suspect that it adopted a narrowly rational model of human behaviour to gain scientific status. Economists like to crunch numbers; what cannot be measured finds a very narrow door to enter their field. There is no guarantee that the available rational models of human behaviour—be it communicative or economic behaviour—are correct or complete. At most, one can i) hope they are; ii) never stop looking for evidence that they are not; and iii) exchange notes with others to see around which model a consensus will eventually grow. I have a feeling Sperber and Wilson are too hopeful: they projected their own desire of rationality onto people's communicative behaviour. In this respect, they share a limitation with Peirce. The main sort of sign-action worth Peirce's attention was scientific inquiry, which he described as a collective quest for truth. A member of his community of inquirers would spend his life trying to strip the sign of all unnecessary veils to reach a state of concrete rationality he called *summum bonum* (CP 6.433, 1893). Both Relevance theory and semiotics, from their different points of view, do not discuss human communication and semiosis for what they probably are but for what they would want them to be. I have no doubt people's communicative and semiotic behaviour is directed towards what they believe will improve their individual wellbeing and that of the group they feel they belong to. However, they may not walk along inferential paths like those described by rational accounts such as economics and Relevance theory; or at least they don't do it as often as these accounts predict.

5.3.3 Communication

Let us proceed in this critical sketch of Relevance theory by accepting the premiss that communicators and audiences are indeed rational. A rational communicator has two basic goals: grabbing the audience's attention and having him see what she means. As to the first goal, all that is required is that the audience believes the ostensive stimulus she puts before him is relevant. Now,

Relevance theory states that the audience not only believes so, but they actually expect from the communicator optimal relevance as defined above. As a consequence, if you project this rational expectation onto sign–action itself, you obtain:

The Communicative Principle of Relevance:

Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 260).

The communicative principle of relevance provides an interesting outlook for a central feature of interpretive semiotics. According to Peirce, all semiosis is teleological. This is fine in logical terms, but exactly what kind of *telos* can we expect in actual human communication? More importantly, what kind of *telos* can we expect in human translated communication? This communicative principle fleshes out the *telos* of semiosis that Peirce's logical investigations predict. The principle says that communicators naturally take advantage of a property of human cognition: the search for relevance. Humans have evolved to produce relevant signs and to interpret other people's signs as relevant. Notwithstanding my reservations about the notion of *optimal* relevance and of the cost–benefit assumptions that run through the theory, this claim is persuasive.

Earlier, we have seen that inference–based theories find it difficult to explain why we understand each other so well and so often. The evolutionary and cognitive solutions put forward by Relevance theory and Peircean semiotics were compared. The communicative principle of relevance effectively tackles the same problem, because it has the effect of delimiting the range of possible interpretations a given ostensive stimulus may receive in practice. Let me recall that maximising relevance is about getting the most cognitive gain for the least processing effort and that human cognition is geared towards such maximisation. The audience will follow a path of least effort in their interpretation of the stimulus and will stop when expectations of relevance are met. Relevance theory's boldest claims is related to this: the audience is authorised to conclude that the first interpretation which meets his expectations of optimal relevance is the one the speaker wanted him

to infer. This is the full sense of the term ‘presumption’ in the communicative principle of relevance and perhaps the core of Relevance theory. The insight explains why we can successfully read each other’s minds so often.

Here the theory ramifies in a rather complex comprehension procedure which would be of little use for our purposes. I will just mention two more points. The first is that all comprehension is contextual comprehension; it is impossible to comprehend an utterance or interpret a sign without some contextual knowledge. This is old hat, but how are utterances and contexts related? The brilliant answer is that the relevance of an utterance is a given, while the context is a variable: the audience will actively select the collateral information that applies to and that is needed to interpret a sign in accordance with the principle of relevance. The second point is about what the authors call descriptive and interpretive use of language. Sperber and Wilson maintain that all utterances are interpretations of a thought the speaker wants to communicate. A descriptive utterance interprets a thought that is “entertained as a true description of some state of affairs” (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 259); an interpretive utterance interprets a thought that is “entertained as an interpretation of some further thought: say, an attributed or a relevant thought” (Ibid.). In semiotic terms, this is a distinction between two classes of object for the sign: i) entities that have never been communicated before and ii) entities that have already been communicated. The distinction does not play a large role in Peirce’s theory of sign, but it is valid and useful for T-semiosis. However, I would suggest caution with the terms, because what signs (thoughts and their expressions) do is allowing an *interpretation* of their objects, and they do it all the time, regardless of whether their objects are part of a process of communication or not. Therefore there is a sense in which all language use is interpretive.

The most intriguing gain of the Relevance-theory research agenda is that it accounts for a very common experience in communication. When we engage in semiosis with fellow human beings (and some other animals as well), we often wonder what the communicator may have in mind, what she wants, and what she wants us to do, say, or think. Perhaps the most intense moments in our

lives are those defined by our attempts to swim upstream from certain special signs that have been made available to us. Such were the words spoken by Mary over the phone one day to John, who was secretly and madly in love with her. 'Would you have Tom's number, by any chance?'—she said—plunging him into despair. In speaking, in writing, and in nonverbal communication, we spend a lot of time to make sure we actually understand each other and can guess each other's intentions correctly. From the communicator's angle, people say things like: 'Please don't take me wrong' and 'Let me clarify this'. From the audience's angle, we often ask questions like: 'What do you mean?', 'Why do you say so?', or—when the tension grows—'Are you calling me X?'. These detours show that people are aware of the risk of miscommunication, misunderstanding, and of the limitations of our signs and sign-systems. In fact, it is as if people knew long before modern hermeneutics that our words and other signs have a life of their own; once they are out in the world, they may not represent us as well and as faithfully as we would like. The second-degree nature of T-semiosis is problematic in this respect, because translators can seldom ask questions like 'what do you mean?'. Very often, a translator begins her work only when the source text is deemed complete. As a consequence, it is not always easy for translators to negotiate its meaning in the source environment and across the source/target fold. Let us take the prototypical case of translating—say—a popular-science book for a publishing house. Sometimes, translators are too shy to discuss with editors and authors or are discouraged to do so. This is a totally irrational state of affairs, because translators need to make sure they are reading the minds of the source communicators just like (or better than) everybody else. Granting translators better semiotic conditions would be in everyone's interest, above all the target audience's. And these would crucially include better interaction with the other communicators. Large parts of Eco's latest book on translation document the benefits of opening a healthy dialogue with translators from the author's point of view (Eco 2003a, eg. 178–9 and *passim*). When interaction is not good enough, translators should adopt what I call *the strategy of the salmon*: they should swim upstream as far as possible to involve authors, editors, and publishers in the generation of their text. This is all the

more important because, unlike ordinary readers, translators must give evidence of their interpretation of the source text; in fact, translating implies a very accurate and comprehensive interpretation of the original and the translated text describes this interpretation in great detail.

This state of affairs can be observed from another angle as well. Detours like ‘What do you mean?’ tend to make communicative interactions between people longer. As a result, semiosis does not seem to proceed along a straight line, but rather to run in circles around a topic, an expression, an attributed belief or desire. It may be objected that extending the interaction will only give error more chances to seep into semiosis and deteriorate it. I believe this is not the case. The objection would be valid if semiosis worked like a mechanical device—say—a car. In 1908, Henry Ford built his Model T after the simplest design afforded by the engineering of his time, and this was vital for its success. If you increase the complexity of a mechanical system you make it more prone to failure for two reasons: i) because the likelihood that each extra component will break remains constant; and ii) because error may affect all relations internal to the system, whose number may grow faster than that of its components. This is generally true of ‘secondness systems’, whose parts are discrete and held together by automatic or action–reaction relations. Secondness systems are defenceless against random error. In contrast, semiosis—including communicative interactions—is a third, therefore it is categorially distinct from mechanical systems. Imagine a teacher who offers Linguistics 101 to two different classes. She introduces the distinction between *langue* and *parole* to her initial class in 30 minutes, as she always does. With the next class—slightly ahead on the syllabus—she will take more questions and will use the whole 90 minutes of her meeting. The interaction with the latter group is longer, but it is simply not the case that the extra hour of discussion will make misunderstanding more likely. In fact, the opposite is true. The students’ questions build upon the teacher’s utterances and her own explanations and examples are refined by the questions. If everything goes well, before long the teacher/students system will start to ‘grow’

and the chance of misunderstanding will actually shrink.¹³ This is generally true of ‘thirdness systems’, whose parts are not discrete but are parts of a continuum and where the element of chance is balanced by an overall *telos*. This gives the system a sense of direction, as well as a general norm that regulates the relations between its parts and effectively filters out random error. What makes a system second is dumb matter; what makes a system third are intangible entities, including intelligence. Thirdness and intelligence are close synonyms.

Were the tendency to take habits replaced by an absolute requirement that the cell should discharge itself always in the same way, or according to any rigidly fixed condition whatever, all possibility of habit developing into intelligence would be cut off at the outset; the virtue of Thirdness would be absent (CP 3.390, 1885).

Some of the ideas of prominent thirdness which, owing to their great importance in philosophy and in science, require attentive study are generality, infinity, continuity, diffusion, growth, and intelligence (CP 2.340, 1895).

Incidentally, this is another reason why inferential models of communication are superior to code models. A code is conceptualised as an assembly of discrete, object-like entities that relate to each other responding to ‘absolute requirements according to rigidly fixed conditions’. But this is not what intelligent people use to interact; code models are closer to Ford’s Model T than to semiosis, communication, and translation.

This is what is involved every time we take a detour from our conversations and other semiotic events to make sure that all the participants are reading from the same sheet of music. These detours also show another important feature of meaning in communication. Communicators and their audiences *agree meaning through constant negotiation* (cf. Eco 1997). Meaning is inherently public and is a form of consensus. A sign on which opinion has already settled can be put on the table again any time the need arises. This confirms that the participants in semiosis can never attain

¹³ OK, I asked you to *imagine* this teacher and her classes; I am aware this happens at Utopia State

certainty; they will eventually settle on what is mutually satisfactory, given the constraints and opportunities provided by a given communication setting. I have already pointed out that inferential models like Relevance theory and Peircean semiosis are based on an irreducible degree of uncertainty. I would like to add here that this should not be seen as a liability but as an asset. Inferential theories are stronger because they recognise uncertainty and make room for it. Because of this, they make it more likely for our investigations to approximate truth and, ultimately, represent reality.

Communication often takes a detour to tune up its semiotic instruments. Often but not always. There are times we don't need to do so because some established practice or ritual behaviour already takes care that we all read from the same sheet of music. When Mary picks up the phone and says 'Hallo', John hardly needs to guess what she means by that (oh well, he sometimes does, but he's *madly* in love). For a more complex example, think of a professional and formal exchange among academics—like submitting a paper or reading a presentation. Such exchanges are supposed to follow Grice's maxim of quality to the letter. In these circumstances, serious academics do not say what they believe to be false, nor do they say that for which they lack adequate evidence. So when Poole and others report in *Nature* that they found two elephants that can imitate the sounds of trucks and of other elephants (Poole et al. 2005), the audience is only entitled to think that they have no reason to believe this to be false, and that the authors can prove it. There is no need for the audience to crank up the inference engine to attribute additional beliefs and desires to the researchers. Established communicative practice in academia makes *mind-reading* straightforward (for the relation between Relevance theory and the fascinating field called Theory of Mind (ToM) see Origgi and Sperber 2000). Let us imagine that Mr Poole is an extremely ambitious man and will use this prestigious publication to apply for a huge grant as of next month. This is a possible inference which, however, would lie at the outer edges of collateral information.

As far as the paper and those elephants are concerned, the maxim of quality is all we need. Ritualised communicative situations like these are a bit like buying fruit at the supermarket rather than from a stall in the street: the price has been already set and there is no room for haggling. Of course, this is old hat. The influence of conventional and stereotypical situations on communication and cognition was identified back in the 1970's, especially as regards expectations (Schank and Abelson 1977). From a Peircean perspective, ritualised communication is a fine illustration of the effects of habits: from the viewpoint of an individual, inferences that solve some problem will have a tendency to stabilise into habits; from the viewpoint of a group, habits that solve some problem will have a tendency to spread and become conventionally accepted practices. Translation norms belong with the latter. Translation norms are unlike Peircean habits in one important sense: they often serve individual and social interests that do not conform to the disinterested rationality of Peirce's 'community of interpreters'.

Finally, this is Peirce's account of why we don't need to rev up the inference engine at full throttle all the time: when habits can be invoked, thought comes temporarily to rest.

And what, then, is belief? It is the demi-cadence which closes a musical phrase in the symphony of our intellectual life. We have seen that it has just three properties: First, it is something that we are aware of; second, it appeases the irritation of doubt; and, third, it involves the establishment in our nature of a rule of action, or, say for short, a **habit**. As it appeases the irritation of doubt, which is the motive for thinking, thought relaxes, and comes to rest for a moment when belief is reached. But, since belief is a rule for action, the application of which involves further doubt and further thought, at the same time that it is a stopping-place, it is also a new starting-place for thought. That is why I have permitted myself to call it thought at rest, although thought is essentially an action (CP 5.397, 1878).

To sum up, Relevance theory is not without its problems for a semiotician. I have stressed the weakness of its account of code- and inference-based communication and proposed a more solid semiotic distinction. On the cognitive side, I have criticised its excessive reliance on a cost-benefit

logic. However, these do not detract from the many important insights the theory can provide to help bring translation semiotics down to earth. We have seen that Relevance theory and Peirce's semiosis share several important assumptions, and that the latter has a broader scope. At the end of this discussion, I believe we can comfortably tap Relevance theory as a resource to explore T-semiosis in action. But before I do this, the following section will give a brief account of the scholar that ferried Relevance theory into translation studies.

5.4 Gutt's Relevance-theory approach to translation and interpreting

The introduction of Relevance theory into translation studies is due to Ernst-August Gutt (Gutt 1990, 1996, 2000a, 2000b, 2004 are some of his contributions). Assuming the online bibliography maintained by Francisco Yus (Yus 2005) is a good source, nobody had written on the nexus between Relevance theory and translation before (Gutt 1985); now the list counts about 80 authors. According to Sonja Tirkkonen-Condit: "Judging from frequent references to it, [*Translation and Relevance*] has become a classic in translation studies in less than ten years" (Tirkkonen-Condit 2002: 193). On the other hand, Chesterman pointed out that in spite of the big claims Gutt made for his theory, its value "lies first of all in the way it brings in an explicit explanatory level, proceeding beyond descriptive taxonomic approaches" (Chesterman 2002b: 23). The interest spurred by Gutt around Relevance theory spilled over into interpreting research (eg. Setton 1999, 2001).

In the 1980s, Gutt carried out research based on the insight that Relevance theory may provide a comprehensive account of translation. His use of the term 'account' is opposed to 'approaches' to translation, which refers to translation methods: "this book intends to be a (theoretical) *account* of translation; its focus is to explain how the phenomenon of translation works. It does not constitute or advocate a particular way of translating" (Gutt 2000b: 203). The analogy with my own research agenda is clear; Gutt's main concern is the establishment of a well-grounded theoretical distinction between translation and non-translation (cf. also Tirkkonen-Condit 1992: 204). To pursue this goal, Gutt makes three big claims. The first one is that translation is a special form of reported speech or

quotation. Secondly, a distinction is made between two kinds of translation: direct translation and indirect translation. Thirdly, Gutt claims that translating does not need a specific theory that accounts for it. The first two claims are based on Sperber and Wilson's discussion of descriptive and interpretive uses of language (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 224–231) which contains one of only two references to translation in their book (Id.: 228). The other mention appears in the postface of the second edition, and it is a reference to the work Gutt himself had produced between 1986 and 1995 (Id.: 259). In what follows, I will briefly summarise and discuss the content of Gutt's *Translation and Relevance* (I will use the second edition Gutt 2000b and some of his other texts).

Gutt's argument moves from a complaint I wholeheartedly subscribe: there is a "lack of a comprehensive approach to translation that is both systematic and theoretically sound" (Id. 1). To overcome this problem, Gutt proposes to use Relevance theory. This approach would benefit translation theory in two ways: it would "shift the domain of the theory away from 'translational behaviour'" (Id. 21), and it would "shift away from the descriptive–classificatory approach" (Ibid.). Gutt's clearly outlined and well written review of Relevance theory follows; however, it seems to me his account is a bit lopsided because it highlights the parts that are important for the rest of his discussion at the expense of those that are central to Relevance theory itself. Purely in terms of pages, the first half of Gutt's review chapter is devoted to inference, context, and the principle of relevance; the second half to the distinction between descriptive and interpretive use of language and interpretive resemblance. This is a fairly marginal topic to which Sperber and Wilson devoted 3 sections in all (Sperber and Wilson 1995, Ch. 4, sections 7–9) plus a paragraph in their second–edition postface (Id.: 259).

Gutt comes into his own with his discussion of covert translations, which constitutes a formidable problem for his theoretical account and research agenda. In his definition, covert translations are texts produced in T–semiosis but not presented as translations to their audience. Why is this a problem? According to Gutt, translation is a typical form of metarepresentation and "[o]ne of the distinctive marks of the use of metarepresentations lies in the fact that they are

intended to achieve relevance by virtue of the resemblance in meaning they bear to what someone else wrote, said or thought” (Gutt 2004: 93). The key phrase here is ‘by virtue of’. Although a translator sought ‘resemblance in meaning to what someone else wrote’ when she produced her text, if this text is released as a covert translation the audience would not know. To them, the text would be relevant by virtue of it representing the state of affairs it is about, not the source text. Recalling Sperber and Wilson’s distinction between descriptive and interpretive use of language, Gutt claims covert translations belong with the former. In the 40–page postface to the second edition of *Translation and Relevance*, Gutt gives the example of a German computer company that releases manuals in German and English. He identifies the communicator as the company that sells the computer and, referring to the manual in English, says that it has:

no intention of informing the user of what some foreign engineer wrote; it rather intends to give the customer adequate instructions about how to operate the machine. Thus, although a process of translation did take place in the production of the English manual, as far as both company and user are concerned the relevance of the manual does not lie in its interpretive resemblance with the original, but in giving an accurate description of how to operate the machine” (Gutt 2000b: 216).

It is fair to say that covert translation—together with pseudo–translation—has been a problem for many translation theorists; however, Gutt’s solution is draconian: covert translations are to be excluded from the scope of his account of translation. Because semioses like the multilingual production of computer manuals are cases of descriptive interlingual communication, Gutt evicts them from the premises of translation studies. One problem with this solution is that the overt/covert distinction is like a toggle switch, whereas a slide cursor would be needed to account for the wide range of situations that can be brought under descriptive and interpretive use of language. This is especially true for the shadings that occupy the space between diegetic summary and direct quotation (Hermans 2005, personal communication, cf. also Taivalkoski–Shilov 2003). Besides, how can one tell overt from covert translations? In Gutt’s example above, what is a *bona fide* act of descriptive use of language to the general audience is in fact an act of interpretive use to the firm’s

technical writers and to anyone who cared to investigate how the manuals were produced. The discriminating factor is not whether a certain text *declares* to be a translation but rather whether it *truthfully* does so; ie, whether it was the result of T-semiosis. This highlights once again the methodological advantage of focussing on sign-action rather than on the resulting signs.

At this point Gutt's argument takes a long, hard look at Nida's dynamic equivalence; a notion that was born in Bible-translation circles where it is still fairly influential. Gutt identifies one specific assumption of dynamic equivalence and other idiomatic approaches to translation: that a message can be communicated to an audience across a semiotic fold regardless of the cognitive context where it originated. Let us use the classical example where the phrase 'Lamb of God' would be rendered into 'Seal of God' for the Eskimos because seals and not lambs symbolise innocence in their culture. This strategy implies that Eskimo receivers interpret the message without learning what lambs stand for in our tradition—in fact, in extreme cases, without knowing what lambs are.

Recalling the relevance-theoretic view that all communication is contextual communication, there is no room for this assumption in Gutt's theory of translation. Dynamic equivalence simply does not recognise the context-dependent nature of communication. It would be easy to take this as an attack on Nida and his followers or as an endorsement of a certain method of translating the Scriptures over another. However, as I stated at the beginning of the present section, Gutt is not interested in any particular 'approach' to translation, he's looking for a general 'account'. All he wants to do is show that dynamic equivalence and idiomatic approaches do not qualify as general theories of translation:

[...] what we are interested in here is [...] an account of translation in general. Therefore our concern in this chapter has been to examine whether *as general theories of translation* the dynamic equivalence approach and idiomatic approaches provide evidence that the goals they have set for translation are achievable *in principle* in both primary and secondary communication situations. As we have seen, due to inadequate views of communication and meaning, this they fail to show (Id. 98).

The problem of context–dependencedness is felt more acutely in Bible translating than elsewhere, because the context of the original texts is literally lost in the past and is indefinitely different from the context in which the translation is produced and circulates. Gutt uses Bible translation a lot in his book and articles, and he knows what he is talking about. In 1970 he joined the Summer Institute of Linguistics (now known as SIL International), a US–based Christian organisation that makes the Bible (or at least part of it) available to people who speak lesser–used languages around the world. In 1974 Gutt started working with the SIL in Ethiopia, and in 1989 he received his Ph.D. in Linguistics from University College London, which is also where Dierdre Wilson works. Gutt’s main affiliation is still with SIL International.

The rest of *Translation and Relevance* is devoted to the claim that translation is a form of interlingual interpretive use and to a detailed discussion of direct and indirect translation. The phrase ‘interpretive use’ refers to a fairly complex and technical notion in Relevance theory which I tried to summarise in succinct, semiotic terms in 5.3.3 above together with ‘descriptive use’ of language. Let me just recall that the former is the interpretation of another thought while the latter is a description of a state of affairs. Gutt develops this insight for translation and asks a clever question: “What is there behind the apparent difference between ‘saying the same thing as someone else’ and ‘saying what someone else said’?” (Id. 210). Gutt maintains that the difference parallels that between descriptive and interpretive uses of language. In practice, when I ‘say what you said’, I must necessarily use language interpretively. A translator is someone who says what another has said across a language barrier. Translating, concludes Gutt, is interlingual quotation:

[...] the relevance–theoretic account has brought us a very significant step closer to understanding the *essence of translation*. Despite longstanding and deeply ingrained scepticism in translation circles about the possibility of ever being able to define translation, relevance theory has made it possible to propose a definition that is simple, explicit—as part of an explicit general theory of communication—and intuitively attractive: translation consists in interlingual quotation, that is it is an instance of

quotation—direct or indirect—where the quote is in a different language from the original (Id.: 236).

I have two qualifications to make. Since the relevance—theoretic notion is not specific to translated communication, Gutt is forced to add that translation is *interlingual* quotation. I believe the term ‘interlingual’ is too restrictive, because translators use both verbal and nonverbal signs in T-semiosis, as the bulk of ‘multimedia translation’ and today’s localisation industry show. Secondly, I would like to criticise Gutt’s use of the term *quotation*. *Translation and Relevance* seems to assume that the target text always strives to maintain the value and the function the original had in its environment. This may be true in a large proportion of cases, but it is certainly inadequate as part of a comprehensive account of T-semiosis. I believe that a general theory of translation should account for the fact that translators re-enact their originals, and this re-enactment sometimes takes paths for which the original had not been designed. It is true that translators represent source texts, but to do so they may adopt original and innovative solutions. To illustrate this point, I will use a classic article by the American anthropologist Laura Bohannan (Bohannan 1966)—somehow reminiscent of Quine’s famous ‘jungle linguist’ struggling with his *gavagai* which may and may not be a rabbit (Quine 1960). While visiting the Tiv people (a population in Nigeria), Ms Bohannan was asked by the village elders to tell them a story and she chose the story of Hamlet. The account of what happened next is both entertaining and highly instructive for a translation scholar. Obviously, her audience endeavoured to interpret her story using their own contextual assumptions and they found many incredible things in *Hamlet* and some ‘mistakes’ too. In fact, at the end of the storytelling session, one of the elders remarked:

“Sometime,” concluded the old man, gathering his ragged toga about him, “you must tell us some more stories of your country. We, who are elders, will instruct you in their true meaning, so that when you return to your own land your elders will see that you have not been sitting in the bush, but among those who know things and who have taught you wisdom” (Bohannan 1966: 33).

I am using this example as an extreme case of re-enactment in a cultural context, language, and setting that are a million miles away from Shakespeare's own—or from our present context of reception in the West, for that matter. Let us look at this exchange. Ms Bohannan says:

"The son Hamlet was very sad because his mother had married again so quickly. There was no need for her to do so, and it is our custom for a widow not to go to her next husband until she has mourned for two years."

"Two years is too long," objected the wife [of an elder]. "Who will hoe your farms for you while you have no husband?"

"Hamlet," I retorted without thinking, "was old enough to hoe his mother's farms himself. There was no need for her to remarry" (Id.: 30).

As is often the case when one explores the outer borders of one's object of study, it is not easy to decide whether Ms Bohannan's storytelling session was a translation event. However, it is precisely because one attempts to take a difficult decision that one must bring the underlying features in sharp focus. In Gutt's terms, there are two reasons why Bohannan's story cannot be a translation. First, because—whatever she does—she certainly does not 'quote' Shakespeare. Second—even if she did—it would be covert interlingual quotation because she never informed the elders that she was relaying someone else's story. In this respect, we would be looking at a variant of the computer-manual example discussed above. Even if the teller intended to use language interpretively, the audience had never heard of Shakespeare; to them the story was fresh. Thus, for Ms Bohannan this was a metarepresentation of fiction, for the Tiv elders it was a fictional representation. How would my model describe Ms Bohannan's semiosis? There is no doubt she had to negotiate very wide gaps indeed, so the *difference* condition is satisfied. She also struggled to keep her account as *similar* as possible to what she thought Hamlet's plot was about. As to *mediation*, her words did try to represent Shakespeare's initially, but it was soon clear that the actual communicative conditions made it impossible for her to 'speak on behalf' of the Bard. So, what would qualify as T-semiosis

in the logical terms of my Foundation eventually did not materialise in a translation event. The potential first did not manage to become a second.

This story highlights the different metaphysical outlooks of Gutt's research and mine. As we saw earlier, Gutt looks for the essence of translation, I—in contrast—am looking for its conditions. In general, I believe that any theory (or account) that attempts to arrive at a positive generalisation of translation is bound to fail, because positive generalisation is defined historically, not theoretically. My notion of T-semiosis, instead, is defined by characters that are negatively general—so to speak (see CP 1.427, 1896 for positive and negative generality). They are pure potentialities that individuals and communities will actualise as they wish. These discrepancies notwithstanding, Gutt's description of translation as interlingual quotation is not incompatible with my model; only, it is not the general account it claims to be. T-semiosis is not *only* interlingual, and it is not *just* quotation. However, T-semiosis is *also* represented by these terms. 'Interlingual quotation' is too restrictive a definition of translation if it stands by itself, but it is a workable description if it is complemented by other notions. I believe Gutt's interlingual quotation is a special and tangible case of my mediation character, and finds its place in the larger picture together with difference (including linguistic difference) and similarity as an attribute of T-semiosis.

Gutt's second claim is that there exist two kinds of legitimate translation: direct and indirect translation. The next quotation will tell us why Gutt felt the need for this distinction:

Intuitively there seems to be something right about the desire to distinguish between translations where the translator is free to elaborate or summarize and those where he has to somehow stick to the explicit contents of the original (Gutt 2000b: 129)

Direct translation does not aim to re-create immediate contextual effects. This mode tries to preserve the linguistic properties of the original and to reproduce all its communicative clues in the target text. This would allow the target audience to infer the explicatures and implicatures of the source text, but to do so he should be able to retrieve the necessary bits from the original context

and use them in his interpretation. In contrast, the goal of indirect translation is to convey as many as possible of the assumptions conveyed by the original so that the target audience can infer contextual effects as he would normally do if he were not reading a translation. Let us read a note on this:

Gutt [...] distinguishes direct translation versus indirect translation. The former is the translation which provides the same communicative cues as the original. The latter is a much wider and interpretive–use–based notion. Besides, “a receptor language utterance is a direct translation of a source language utterance if and only if it purports to interpretively resemble the original completely” (Gutt, 1990: 154), something which cannot be achieved in typical secondary communication situations in which ST language and TT language differ. One requisite of direct translation, that “the success of any attempt to communicate the original interpretation will require that this target language stimulus be processed using the context envisaged by the original author” (Gutt 1992: 64) is not possible in secondary situations (Mateo and Yus 2000: 113).

I could not find enough new material or original insight in this distinction. Direct and indirect translation looks dangerously similar to old dichotomies such as literal versus free translation, form versus meaning, etc. Perhaps, one point of interest is the discussion that shows that both modes—direct and indirect translation—are forms of interpretive use (Gutt 2000b, Ch. 7).

Gutt’s third big claim is that translating does not need a specific theory that accounts for it: “relevance theory ultimately does away with the need for an independent theory of translation by subsuming it under the more abstract category of verbal communication” (Venuti 2000: 334). This is because Gutt maintains that translating is nothing more than the interlingual variant of the interpretive use of language—which is a general communicative behaviour that applies to translations and nontranslations alike. More accurately, Gutt trusts Relevance theory to explain what is essential both in non–translated and translated communication. In his own words:

This paper argues that the phenomenon commonly referred to as “translation” can be accounted for naturally within the relevance theory of communication developed by

Sperber and Wilson: there is no need for a distinct general theory of translation (Gutt 1990: 135).

This quote appeared ahead of the first edition of *Translation and Relevance*. Ten years later, Gutt's position would become even more entrenched:

To get this issue clear, we must first consider the understanding of the term 'translation theory'. The declared aim of this book is to propose an *explanatory theory* in the sense of a *cause–effect account of translation as a phenomenon of communication*. This theory is intended to explain how it is possible for a human communicator to convey to an audience in language B what someone expressed in a different language A, what chain of causality in the human mind makes that possible, what factors contribute to its success or failure, and how. If *that* is what one expects a 'translation theory' to do, then my claim is indeed that there is no need for developing a separate theory of translation, with concepts and a theoretical framework of its own. In *that particular sense* I do indeed claim that there is no need for a general theory of translation (Gutt 2000b: 235).

Tirkkonen–Condit is one of the scholars who sharply criticised this view. In a review article that appeared soon after the publication of the first edition of *Translation and Relevance*, she wrote:

An understanding of such a complex phenomenon as translation calls for a theory. Ernst–August Gutt's contribution is theoretical, and its aim is to improve our understanding of translation. Paradoxically, however, its aim is also to argue that a theoretical account of translation can simply do away with translation theory (Tirkkonen–Condit 1992: 237).

Complacency in relation to the powers of relevance theory in explaining translation phenomena is perhaps the greatest shortcoming in Gutt's contribution (Id.: 243).

However, even if we accept relevance theory as a relatively sound overall theoretical account of translation, we cannot sit back complacently and abandon further research at a stage when very little is known, for example, about the knowledge base and cognitive processes underlying translators' decisions (Id.: 244).

Tirkkonen–Condit did not notice any improvement reviewing the second edition of *Translation and Relevance* and focussed her criticism on the issue of interlinguality. The point is well taken, because

in Gutt's account the only feature specific to T-semiosis is its interlingual character, therefore the only theory specific to translation would be a theory of interlinguality.

The author takes it for granted that translation is interlingual [...] as if the switch from one language system to another would not bring any unique cognitive elements to the communication event that calls for explanation (Tirkkonen–Condit 2002: 195)

To summarise, the account of translation within the framework of relevance theory is as good as far as it goes. However, it does not go far enough to explain those phenomena in translation products and processes that are attributable not to relevance but to the interlingual essence of translation (Id.: 196).

I broadly agree with Tirkkonen–Condit's views, especially her first complaint that translation does not need a distinct theory for itself. This is strategically unhelpful, because one risks drawing too large and too loose a circle around translation thus dissolving its core issues into a theory of communication. Other critics noticed this difficulty (cf. Fawcett 1997, esp. 244; Malmkjær 1992, esp. 307).

Although I share these reservations, I believe the real problem lies elsewhere. It seems to me that Gutt's research strategy is too narrow. His writings provide enough evidence that he is generalising the form of translation he is most familiar with: Bible translation. Gutt took the only explicit reference to translation in *Relevance* and developed it against the ideological and experiential background prevalent in the institution he is affiliated to—the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Indeed, if one works one's interpretation of Gutt's positions out of this assumption, a great many of them suddenly make perfect sense. For instance, let us read this passage:

The translator *qua* translator must form in his/her mind an informative intention and compose a stimulus that will make this intention manifest to the target audience. S/he differs from an original communicator in that the information presented in the translation comes with the claim of being relevant by virtue of its resemblance to what someone said or wrote in another language (Gutt 2000a: 173).

Recalling the special meaning of informative and communicative intentions in Relevance theory (see 5.3), this excerpt says the translator is granted the former but not the latter. She wants to say what she inferred from the original and its context, but she will not inform her audience of her informative intention. In spite of this, the audience will not notice something's missing; they will assume that the translation mirrors the communicative intention of the source author to them without distortion. This is perhaps the core of Gutt's theory:

[A]n account of translation as interlingual interpretive use [...] could be said to achieve what translation theory has been attempting to do for a long time—that is, to develop a concept of faithfulness that is generally applicable and yet both text- and context-specific. [...] It is text-specific in that interpretive use will link the communicative intention of the translator to the intended interpretation of the original text (Id.: 127–8)

Setton's position on this issue is even clearer:

In translation, *the* prominent intention formed by the translator is to shape speech forms to serve the speaker/writer's communicative intentions, to the best of his/her (the translator's) ability, within the constraints of another language (Setton 2001: 124).

I take these arguments to mean that translators are denied communicative intentions of their own; however, this is a perfectly sensible position for Bible translating, where the voice of the translator in the target text is to remain so feeble that it can be safely regarded as negligible. Making room for the communicative intentions of a Bible translator would unnecessarily burden the model and undermine its parsimony. However, Bible translating is hardly representative of translating in general. In other settings, a translation project may want to make its own statement by virtue of releasing certain texts into the target contexts. One example is reported in (Stecconi and Torres Reyes 1997), where a group of Filipino committed intellectuals translated militant poetry to circumvent the censure of the Marcos regime. A general theory of translation should make room for translatorial communicative intentions, as will be discussed in the next section.

5.5 *Relevance theory for T-semiosis*

Relevance theory is important for my semiotic model of translation because it allows us to specify what T-semiosis may look like in practical terms. Throughout his life, Peirce's interest remained with the most general entities—the working of signs in general, including thoughts and conceptions—and his method remained that of a logician. To him, a conversation was nothing more than a mere instantiation of logico-semiotic features. In contrast, Relevance theory is an attempt—no matter how abstract—to explain how people communicate. Verbal and nonverbal interaction between women and men defines its topic and delimits its discourse. For these reasons, Peircean semiotics was all we needed to look for the general conditions to T-semiosis, but another body of theory is now required to cross the bridge between the negative-definitorial terrain of the Foundation and actual translation events. In the first part of this chapter, Relevance theory has been presented, discussed, and adapted to our purposes. In this last sections, it will help us find the specific and the typical features of actual translating.

5.5.1 ToM: an experiment with Calvino

We infer information and meaning from signs that modify our cognitive horizons. When we recognise them as ostensive stimuli, our inference takes the form of mind-reading—ie, we use the evidence provided by the signs to attribute beliefs and desires to the communicator (cf. Sperber and Wilson 2002, 2004 § 5). Whenever we have evidence that something is an intentional sign, we naturally tend to attribute it to a communicator. Most people think that if they can perceive a human sign, it is because *someone* is trying to say something to them. Important cultural signs of uncertain attribution are evidence of this cognitive feature. It was the sheer will of generations of readers that actually 'created' Homer and modelled him after the bards that are probably responsible for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. There is no guarantee a man called Homer actually lived, but his figure makes it much easier for us to cognitively handle those old epic cycles. The same logic is at work in

Jupiter's thunderbolts or in black magic: certain natural signs or accidents become cognitively more manageable if they can be attributed to anthropomorphic entities like gods or evil creatures.

Now, let me tell you one thing. It sometimes seems to me that a pestilence has struck the human race in its most distinctive faculty—that is, the use of words. It is a plague afflicting language, revealing itself as a loss of cognition and immediacy, an automatism that tends to level out all expression into the most generic, anonymous, and abstract formulas, to dilute meanings, to blunt the edge of expressiveness, extinguishing the spark that shoots out from the collision of words and new circumstances. At this point, I would like you to play a game. The two sentences between 'It sometimes seems to me' and 'new circumstances' above are evidence of a strong ethical reaction to the great damage the age of information is doing to language and consciousness; a loss of exactitude. As you were reading them, you attributed this reaction to the person referred to by the personal pronoun *me*. Because there is no indication to the contrary, you may be led to think that I, Ubaldo Steconi, am such person. You may have looked for similarities—a crucial move in all inference—between the mental states you could infer from the passage and other beliefs and desires of mine you have been reading in this chapter and in this book so far. At the same time, you may have noticed that the passage was too good to be true—so to speak. Let us end our game here, because—you see—the two sentences are from Patrick Creagh's translation into English of the last manuscript (and first posthumous book) by Italo Calvino. Here are the original passage and its translation in canonical format:

Alle volte mi sembra che un'epidemia pestilenziale abbia colpito l'umanità nella facoltà che più la caratterizza, cioè l'uso della parola, una peste del linguaggio che si manifesta come perdita di forza conoscitiva e di immediatezza, come automatismo che tende a livellare l'espressione sulle formule più generiche, anonime, astratte, a diluire i significati, a smussare le punte espressive, a spegnere ogni scintilla che sprizzi dallo scontro delle parole con nuove circostanze (Calvino 1988a: 58).

It sometimes seems to me that a pestilence has struck the human race in its most distinctive faculty—that is, the use of words. It is a plague afflicting language, revealing

itself as a loss of cognition and immediacy, an automatism that tends to level out all expression into the most generic, anonymous, and abstract formulas, to dilute meanings, to blunt the edge of expressiveness, extinguishing the spark that shoots out from the collision of words and new circumstances. (Calvino 1988b: 56).

Now that you know the truth, your mind-reading must change tack. You can no longer attribute these thoughts to me, but whose mind are you reading instead? Because you are aware you're reading a translation, to whom are you attributing these bitter remarks: to Creagh or to Calvino? If Gutt is right, as we saw earlier, you would try to infer the source author's intentions using T-semiosis as a mirror. So, in a case like this he would say that 'It sometimes seems to me' is a direct interlingual quotation of 'Alle volte mi sembra' and derives *all* its relevance from it. Therefore both 'me' and *mi* refer to Calvino, and to Calvino alone. This is in many respects true—many but not all.

5.5.2 Informative and communicative intentions

I would like to use Sperber and Wilson's notions of informative and communicative intention to complement Gutt's position. Let me recall that both Relevance theory and Peircean semiotics assign an active role to the audience in sign-action and in the generation of meaning and sense. Therefore, communicating means making it clear to the audience that an act of interpretation is expected of him and that its object should be a certain sign which is altering his cognitive environment. At the same time, it should be clear to all participants that the sign in question has been designed as evidence of a certain state of mind. This complex play that frames communication and makes it possible is captured in Sperber and Wilson's informative and communicative intentions. I have made brief reference to them in 5.3 above, but here I need to go back to them in more detail. The informative intention is fairly intuitive and a simple definition will do. It is "[t]he intention to inform the audience of something" (Sperber and Wilson 2004: 611). For the communicative intention, it is better to use the more carefully phrased definition found in *Relevance*. Communicating involves "to make it mutually manifest to audience and communicator that the

communicator has this informative intention” (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 61, full discussion 46–64). It is thanks to this ‘mutual manifestness’ of ostensive acts of communication that the audience can read the mind of the communicator.

In a typical translation event, there is no doubt that the translator wants to say something to her audience: she wants to say what she understood from the original and, more generally, she wants to share the interpretants she formulated and stabilised as she was participating in the source semiosis. Identifying her communicative intention is not difficult either, because this is part of the norms that define and regulate translation. In a specific point of the spacetime continuum, people know the kind and extent of communicative intention translators are supposed to show. However, describing translators’ communicative intention *in general* is a lot more problematic. Does a translator “indicate to the audience that she is trying to communicate with them in [an] overt, intentional way” (Sperber and Wilson 2004: 611)? I would not say this characterises T-semiosis well enough. There is a difference in this respect between—say—an e-mail message a translator writes to a friend and a translation she needs to finish by close of business today. When she translates, she behaves a bit like Mary in this micro-play:

Mary yawns, intending to inform Peter that she is tired, and hoping that her yawn will look natural. She does not do it too well: it is all too obvious that her yawn is artificial—and her informative intention becomes mutually manifest (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 64).

Typically, a translator too strives to make her text ‘look natural’. Also, there is a sense of ‘not doing it well’ that is specific to translating, such as cumbersome translator’s notes, false friends and other interference effects. In general, there are expressions that are non-standard in the target environment and that give away the text as a translation. Most translators try to minimise or prevent the spread of ‘translationese’ which would make their texts look artificial. I would like to stress that these remarks apply to typical translation events, not to all. There are well documented cases in which the very artificiality of translationese has been actively sought and exploited. Perhaps the most famous of these is (Pound 1973) in which the American-born poet used translation as a

wooden horse for his new poetic diction. But these cases are rare and actually confirm the general insight that translators try to ‘look natural’. In relevance–theoretic terms, this means that a translator often intends to inform their audiences of something but does not want to fully disclose this intention. This analysis corresponds with Gutt’s so far. In effect—as I have already stated—a lot of what he says make perfect sense in my model. However, there is a big difference too. Gutt uses this feature to conclude that T–semiosis is in essence quoting across a language barrier. Instead, I would like to use it to open a new chapter altogether: that of translatorial intentions. In nontranslation, when a communicator tries to suppress or hide her communicative intention she does so to have her audience believe he draws a certain conclusion in full autonomy. In T–semiosis, communicative intentions are designed to have the audience attribute states of mind to someone else as well: the source author.¹⁴ How are communicative intentions designed in T–semiosis? Imagine the translator can magically state her informative and communicative intentions to her audience speaking from the target text. She may say one of three things.

1. Hey look here, there is something I want to say to you;
2. Hey look here, there is something she wants to say to you (‘she’ is the source author);
3. Hey look here, there is something we want to say to you.

Magic utterance 1 corresponds to what I did earlier with Calvino’s reflection on the decay of language. Taken at face value, utterance 1 is plagiarism or a lie because it presents a text that has been produced by T–semiosis as an original. Explicit or implicit statements like these are used to release pseudo–originals into the target environment (not the same as Gutt’s covert translation; see below in this sub–section). However, when the audience finds out that the text represents someone else’s thought as well, the reaction may be negative. In fact, I bet some of you have felt mildly irritated by the game I asked you to play with Calvino. This is understandable. For some centuries

¹⁴ For the sake of clarity, in the rest of this section I will simplify real–life situations and pretend translations are produced from a single original by a well–defined author.

now, people in the West share a cultural habit whereby everyone responsible for the production of a cultural object should be given his or her due. Barring special circumstances, when the scam is unveiled, utterance 1 would be rejected, and the audience would automatically convert it into 2 or 3. Let us now move to Magic utterance 2. This utterance too can be used to lie; it would come in handy for someone who wanted to peddle as translation a text that was actually produced by ordinary semiosis—ie, release a pseudo-translation. A variant of magic utterance 2 would read as follows:

2.1 Hey look here, there is something I want to say to you ('I' stands for the source communicator).

This would represent the case in which T-semiosis is totally covert: the translator vanishes from view, and the text is released in the target environment as a nontranslation. Please notice the difference between pseudo-originals and covert translations: both tell the same lie, because they claim to be nontranslations although they are born in T-semiosis. However, a pseudo-original is evidence of states of mind that are to be attributed to the translator, a covert translation is evidence of states of mind that are to be attributed to the source author. EU legislation in languages other than those used for drafting and debating proposals are covert translations. Although I appreciate the fine distinctions Gutt makes, I do not share his animadversion against covert translations; there is no doubt for me that translation studies should include the study of covert translation for the very simple reason that it is one of the results of T-semiosis.

I mention these cases to discard them and focus on instances where utterance 2 tells the truth. When this utterance tells the truth and is spoken from a text that was indeed born in T-semiosis, it corresponds to the typical idea that Gutt and many traditionally-minded people have of translation. According to these positions, all a translator wants is allow her audience to infer the source author's intentions. This amounts to saying that a translator has no communicative intention of her own; she is entitled only to an informative intention. At the limit, there would be little difference between a translator and a spokesperson reading out a statement from the President during a press conference.

How does magic utterance 2 represent a translator's position in ostensive communication? Very poorly, I believe. As you may recall, the present study is based on the hypothesis that it is possible to open a clearing for T-semiosis in the semiosphere. Chapter 4 found three logico-semiotic conditions in the Foundation and identified T-semiosis as a specific form of semiosis. On the strength of those arguments, it is not easy to take magic utterance 2 at face value. If there exists a specific form of semiosis for translation, translating will also be a deliberate act of communication in its own right. One important consequence is that translating is not to be regarded as a defective form of ordinary sign-production; a form stricken by clinical syndromes associated with specific genetic deficiencies. T-semiosis is distinct from ordinary semiosis and perfectly healthy in its specificity. Another consequence is that whoever is responsible for this act of communication must come to terms with both her informative and communicative intentions. Pretending a communicative intention is not there at all is futile at best and self-defeating at worst. Because T-semioses are acts of communication in their own right, magic utterance 3 is the best approximation to translated ostensive-inferential communication. T-semiosis is a communicative event that gives evidence of beliefs and desires that can be attributed to (at least) two minds at the same time: the source author's and the translator's. The translator and her audience know that semiotic responsibility is shared among these two figures. This state of affairs corresponds to Sperber and Wilson's intentions only in part: it is mutually manifest, but it is about the informative intentions of two communicators, not one. Therefore, the next step is finding out who is responsible for what in T-semiosis and to what degree.

5.5.3 Reading the minds of two agents

To keep the fiction I've been using earlier, when the audience is given enough evidence that he is interpreting a translation rather than a nontranslation, he will hear a magic voice from the translated text whispering: 'Hey look here, there is something we want to say to you'. The audience may then start to interpret the text and attribute beliefs and desires to two agents. It must be said this does not

happen all the time. Translation is all around us, and even when the evidence is available the audience doesn't always pay attention to it. This is very well, of course. When TV viewers in Amsterdam or Bangkok watch the international news, why should they stop to ponder the fact that the original newswire was probably in English? One can fruitfully invoke the principle of relevance to explain cases like these. Many people do not attend to translations *qua* translations because doing so would not give them much positive cognitive gain. The sign already fulfils the audience's expectation of optimal relevance before it is considered as a *translated* sign. Often people focus on it being a translation only when something goes wrong—such as lost lip sync in a dubbed film. In those case, it may be an advantage for the audience to wonder “What if this is a problem of translation?” Framing the problem in these terms often allows the audience to negotiate the obstacle and proceed with the interpretation of the sign. When the audience does attend to translations *qua* translations, they can use their mind-reading ability with whoever was responsible for the original and whoever was responsible for the translation.¹⁵ I will begin with the former.

I believe that attributing beliefs and desires to the original author via a translated text does not involve radically different inferences with respect to nontranslated communication. Perhaps, an interesting feature may be a dearth of ‘collateral’ information in the sense Peirce gave to the term in the quotation included in section 5.2. Let me remind you that interpreting a text or a sign involves a certain amount of prior knowledge which is not acquired either from the code to which the sign belong or from what the sign denotes directly. Because translated communication very often negotiates cultural differences, chances are that a translated text will be about things that are

¹⁵ Again, these long phrases remind us that ‘author’ and ‘translator’ are convenient labels for teams of translators, revisors, project managers, etc. It is true that it is always possible to attribute individual choices to individual persons. For instance, the title of Sperber and Wilson’s *Relevance* for the Italian market is *Pertinenza*. This title is mainly the responsibility of Gloria Origgi, who translated the book into Italian (Sperber and Wilson 1993). However, even in this simple case I would expect several other people were involved in discussing the title with Ms Origgi, considering it when she first proposed it, and finally accepting it for the final publication. I will continue to use ‘author’ and ‘translator’ with this in mind and as *partes pro toto*.

unfamiliar to the target audience. For instance, look at this statement by Plato: “But the Scythians and Thracians, both men and women, drink unmixed wine, which they pour on their garments, and this they think a happy and glorious institution” (Laws 637 E). This fragment is understood properly only if one knows that the ancient Greeks and Romans did not drink their wine pure, but mixed with water. Insufficient collateral information may affect the interpretation of nontranslations in like fashion. Readers in—say—Dublin would need a lot of it to make proper sense of “Kiss me Goodbye” an English–language short story about a girlie bar in Quezon City, Manila (Dalisay 1984). This means that the issue of collateral information is not *unique* to T–semiosis, it is merely *typical* of it. For this is reason I will focus on the beliefs and desires of translators as they are manifested by T–semiosis.

5.5.4 Reading the translator’s mind

Three abstract states of mind can be inferred from the product of T–semiosis: a desire to play *interpre*s, motives for individual translation projects, and global translation strategies for T–semiosis in action. These states of mind are associated to the characters of my Foundation: similarity, difference, and mediation, respectively.

As a rule, the target audience can attribute to all translators the desire to make the source sign ‘manifest or more manifest’ to him—to use Sperber and Wilson’s original phrasing for the informative intention (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 58). I would call it **the desire to play *interpre*s**. *Interpres* is one of the Latin terms for ‘translator’ (cf. Folena 1991). I chose it because it also meant ‘middleman, negotiator, and broker’. From this viewpoint, translators want to be mediators and to close a deal between buyer and seller. I also like its uncertain etymology: *inter–pres* can be either ‘between parties’ or ‘between prices’. For all these reasons together, *interpre*s highlights the translator’s position as focus point of the negotiation T–semiosis always involves (cf. Eco 2003a). Moreover, I use the phrase ‘manifest or more manifest’ because T–semiosis solves much more than the problem of incomprehensibility—ie, its effects exceed the mere desire to make manifest to the

audience otherwise not-understandable signs. Recalling the sense of ‘mediation’ given in 4.4.3 above—especially with reference to the specific forms of representation and re-enactment described and prescribed by prevailing translation norms—I believe the *interpre*s intention applies to T-semiosis in general.

The *interpre*s intention may be embodied by a number of specific motivations to translate, so the audience may want to attribute intentions to the translator on the basis of the evidence provided by the T-semiosis event and setting, by the translation itself, and by its paratext. I would call these the **motives** for a T-semiosis event (cf. Toury 1986: 1116 for a similar view). As long as there is enough evidence one is looking at a translation, one may always expect that not the target text in itself but the text as part of a T-semiosis event ‘conveys a presumption of its own relevance’. One can always wonder why those responsible for the translation event thought that this particular text would be worth translating for the target environment and why they would expect that the introduction of the new text into the target environment would be worth the effort. In other words, one may wonder: Why this text was translated and not another? Why was it made available here and not elsewhere? Why now and not at another time? etc. What makes these questions useful for the translation scholar is that they are not about the target text in its relations with the source, the target audience, etc. These questions are about the translation event itself. An act of T-semiosis is an act of communication *sui generis*.

If the *interpre*s desire was general to all translating, motives are specific and apply to each translation event, taking account of the differences that each needs to negotiate. At times, the audience’s inferential work required to identify a translation’s motive is made deliberately easy. For instance, when I selected and translated a collection of Philippine short stories for the Italian readership (VV.AA. 1999), I tried to spell out why I was doing it in great clarity (see 5.6.4 below). But there are also cases in which the search for a specific motive is made deliberately difficult. The main portal of the European Union (<http://europa.eu.int/>) comes in 20 languages but it does not offer any direct clue as to the why and how of the translation processes involved. The inquisitive

audience will have to do some research before he can establish a clear motive for this quite amazing display of multilingualism. He will then find out that the EU is the only supranational or international organisation which grants the citizens a 'constitutional' right to use their own (national) languages when dealing with its institutions (cf. Directorate-General for Translation of the European Commission 2004). Even then, the audience will not be able to attribute this motive to anyone in particular but to the institution as a whole.

Finally, one can read the mind of a translator focussing on textual and other evidence to find out *how* T-semiosis negotiated the differences and mediated between the source and target sides. I would call this a translator's **strategy**. A very sophisticated audience is required to identify a strategy; it must be someone who possesses a knowledge similar to that of the translator: knowledge of source and target contextual implications, knowledge of the two sign systems, knowledge of the issues and topics as they are represented in the sign that has been the object of T-semiosis, etc. This kind of audience is very small but fairly influential for the development of collective translation habits. It includes—among others—translation teachers and students, critics, scholars, etc. In publishing houses, localisation firms, and multilingual institutions it includes revisers, managers and other figures who have a say on a translator's future earnings and job opportunities. In some cases, this selected and influential audience includes the source author himself. Here the story becomes interesting: you may have the positive and relaxed attitude Umberto Eco recorded in many of his writings on translation (eg. Eco 2001, 2003b) in which he related the open dialogue and spirit of cooperation he established with the translators of his novels into other languages. Alternatively, you may have terrifying accounts like the one Milan Kundera included as a preface to the 'definitive' version of his novel *The Joke* in English (Kundera 1992; cf. also Kuhlenczák 1990).

As with motives, there may be enough material to infer a translator's strategy from paratextual statements attached to the target text. The most famous such paratext must be Cicero's *De optimo genere oratorum*, which is a preface to a translation of two Greek speeches. In it, Cicero included indications that allow us to reconstruct both his motives and his strategy. Rita Copeland identified

the former in the context of a rhetorical debate (Copeland 1991, esp. 9–36). As to the latter, the famous statement opposing the styles of translators and orators is exactly what I mean by a translator’s strategy. When Cicero said that he preferred to weigh words rather than count them, he gave us a penetrating figure to describe his translation strategy (see section 6.4 for a fuller discussion). Apart from the paratext, the evidence to establish a strategy may be gleaned from the target text itself. Most of this inferential work is directed to reverse-engineer the choices made by the translator as she was producing it and to establish the relations between the observable strategies and the prevailing norms—ie, the translator’s effort to either follow or subvert them. Let us take a last look at the excerpt from Calvino’s *Six Memos* to give an example of these inferences based on the surface elements of the target text:

Alle volte mi sembra che un’epidemia pestilenziale abbia colpito l’umanità nella facoltà che più la caratterizza, cioè l’uso della parola, una peste del linguaggio che si manifesta come perdita di forza conoscitiva e di immediatezza, come automatismo che tende a livellare l’espressione sulle formule più generiche, anonime, astratte, a diluire i significati, a smussare le punte espressive, a spegnere ogni scintilla che sprizzi dallo scontro delle parole con nuove circostanze (Calvino 1988a: 58)

It sometimes seems to me that a pestilence has struck the human race in its most distinctive faculty—that is, the use of words. It is a plague afflicting language, revealing itself as a loss of cognition and immediacy, an automatism that tends to level out all expression into the most generic, anonymous, and abstract formulas, to dilute meanings, to blunt the edge of expressiveness, extinguishing the spark that shoots out from the collision of words and new circumstances. (Calvino 1988b: 56).

It seems to me that Patrick Creagh showed a sacred reverence for Calvino. Departures from the strictest lexical and syntactic relations are few and far between. I have found three in this passage with great effort. *Una peste del linguaggio* could have been “a language plague”; *forza conoscitiva* could have been “cognitive powers”; and *ogni scintilla* could have been “any spark” or “every spark”. They could have been, but were not; Creagh’s strategy of introducing slight, almost

imperceptible bumps along the smooth line of faithfulness give readers of English the flowing and beautiful prose in which they would recognise Calvino's voice one last time.

A desire to play *interpretes*, event-specific motives and translation strategies are states of mind one can attribute to whoever is actively engaged in T-semiosis. These states of mind constitute another of Peirce's One, Two, Three series. As such, a desire to play *interpretes* is a precondition for anyone who wants to do T-semiosis; motives factually correspond to aspects of translation events; and successful strategies tend to become habits for translators. I will not tire to repeat that triads should always be regarded as parts of one continuum. For instance, an exclusive focus on strategies, which is so prevalent in translation studies literature, would produce incomplete accounts. For the same reason, I make no claim that each of these states are unique to translation by themselves. For instance, if motives were taken in isolation, the questions I raised earlier could be referred to nontranslations as well. When a new novel appears, people may legitimately ask 'why this text and not another?', 'why here and not elsewhere?', 'why now and not at another time?'. In sum, what is special and pertinent to T-semiosis is the triad that *interpretes*, motives, and strategy compose. The series is made of fairly abstract classes: the *interpretes* is pure potentiality; motives to embark in a translation event may be a million (including zero-degree motives such as doing what bosses, clients and receivers expect); and strategies are habits that are subject to change to keep pace with new translation problems and new translating conditions.

5.6 Agency

In the last section I showed that translators have both informative and communicative intentions of their own: these are specific states of mind that can be inferred on the evidence provided by T-semiosis. However, the wish to play *interpretes*, a motive like—say—making a poetological statement through translation, or the strategies employed to mediate between source and target environments are necessary but insufficient conditions for T-semiosis to happen. The *interpretes*–motives–strategy triad has to do with people's intentions as they engage in T-semiosis; but T-

semiosis itself does not grow on trees, it must be willed into existence by a sentient agent. The discussion in the last section left another loose thread: an insufficient degree of abstraction. I have just admitted that there may be a million motives behind translation events; in principle, there may be as many of them as there are translation projects. Because motives are part of a one–two–three series, their variability may affect the whole triad. In this section I will try to tackle both issues: i) I will sketch an abstract theory of agency for T–semiosis and ii) I will try to bring this high degree of variability under control. I will attempt to do so using a principle of classification that combines translatorial desires and the folds in the semiosphere that people negotiate through T–semiosis. This will bring to a close my explorations into the phenomenology of T–semiosis which I started with the introduction of Relevance theory.

5.6.1 Who causes T–semiosis to happen?

T–semiosis occurs in the vicinity of a fold in the semiosphere (see 4.4.2 above). These folds need not arise only between natural languages and they need not result in utter incomprehension. During T–semiosis a text grows across the fold and, thanks to this, the interaction of some people on opposite sides improves or is enabled. Several people contribute to this growth; in fact, there may be quite a crowd around translated communication: communicators and an audience on the source side, translators and other figures in between, more communicators and audience on the target side, etc. However, not all these figures have the same say on the *birth* of a translation. American viewers watching *The West Wing* on TV contributed very little to the series being exported to France. They just made it into a successful soap opera and therefore potentially marketable abroad. The executives from NBC and France 2 had much bigger roles in bringing to life this large–impact translation event. I would like to call ‘agents’ those who are responsible for a *new strain* of T–semiosis. I believe agents can be logically divided in three groups:

1. agents on the target side that **pull** a text over a fold;

2. agents on the source side that **push** a text over a fold; and
3. agents at some intercultural that **shuffle** texts on their own initiative.

Let me add a couple of notes before I proceed. I am using the term ‘agent’ as distinct from ‘individual’, ‘person’, ‘people’, etc. My agents are essentially functions that often denote more, and sometimes fewer, than three people. It is easy to see why a group of people can act collectively as one agent; think of the board of directors that decides to localise a company’s website. The opposite case is rarer and less intuitive. Perhaps the best example are those writers who translated themselves into a different language; like Beckett into French (cf. Steiner 1975: 473), Tagore into English (cf. Sengupta 1990), or Joyce into Italian and French (cf. Eco 2003a: 303–312). Finally, I am not presenting these three cases as mutually exclusive. It is altogether possible that the interests of agents from both sides of the fold converge on a single translation project as was likely for *The West Wing*. The fact that agents are non-mutually-exclusive functions needs not be a problem. Although I will use plenty of examples in the next sub-sections, my discourse remains phenomenological and speculative, not sociological and empirical. My goal is not to identify real-life actors but to classify them in relation to semiotic folds. In what follows I will sketch very briefly how a will to employ T-semiosis to deal with a semiotic barrier can conceivably be expressed.

5.6.2 Pull

Descriptivist scholars (eg. Toury 1995) stress that translations are facts that belong with the receiving culture. They have a point, especially when it comes to locating where the longing, the need, or the demand for translation arises most often. Translating is expensive, time consuming and hard work, therefore the wish for translation is likely to be found where one expects a sufficient return. Such return may take different forms, one of which is the expectation to sharpen one’s edge using the (scientific, intellectual, aesthetic, etc.) knowledge one suspects others already possess (cf.

Simon 1990: 113). When this expectation is lacking, translation activity is modest. For instance, it has been remarked that countries and cultures that perceive themselves as technologically self-sufficient translate little (Bassnett 1991: 11). This insight is partly confirmed by the *Index Translationum* kept online by Unesco which contains “information on books translated and published in about one hundred of the UNESCO Member States since 1979” (http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=7810&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html).

According to this source, the US ranks eleventh in the world behind Finland, which has a fraction of its readership. So, it seems that a desire to translate is correlated with the desire to acquire something from others. When this comes to pass translation projects are **pulled** by agents that lie on the receiving end of semiotic folds the project is supposed to overcome. As a matter of fact, it seems to me that an agent pulling a text–sign across a semiotic fold is the most intuitive setting for T–semiosis. The mind goes to a publisher who attends the Frankfurt Book Fair, eyes a promising foreign title, and secures the translation right for his company. I want to give you a different story to exemplify what I mean by ‘pull’. I collected it from an official of the Inter–American Development Bank (IADB) in 2000. I had noticed that the portal of the IADB offered a surprising choice of languages: English, French, Portuguese and Spanish—which are arguably the institution’s working languages—plus Japanese. I asked Mr Ortiz of the IADB Department of Information Technology to explain this fact. This is part of his reply:

Our publication section has a newsletter called *El Bid*, written in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. [...] A few years ago, our organisation opened an office in Tokyo, and we realised that most of our publications were delivered but not read, so this office created a new version in Japanese of *El Bid*. Because the creation of pages in Japanese does not incur in any type of major expense for us other than converting them to PDF files, we have a link to pages in Japanese (Ortiz 2000, personal communication).

Since then, things have changed. As predicted by Mr Ortiz in our correspondence, the site has been properly localised and structured around the four main languages (<http://www.iadb.org/>). Back in 2000, the desire to jump over the fold originated in what would become the target environment. The source text *El Bid* was pulled by the Tokyo office from Washington D.C., where the institution has its headquarters. Please notice that I am not making any other assumptions. Not all the persons in the receiving locale who willed the Japanese version need be Japanese. The decision probably involved people from several cultures and nationalities, as is often the case in these institutions, and was certainly ratified in Washington D.C. I chose this story precisely because it helps us isolate the desire to trigger T-semiosis. An agent put herself in the shoes of potential target receivers and realised that a fold hindered the growth of a strand of semiosis she really cared for. Then she effectively used translation to pull the sign towards her locale.

5.6.3 Push

Not everybody, including myself, is happy with the idea that translations are *only* facts of the receiving culture. The rise of the localisation industry is a recent, gigantic development in our trade that indicates otherwise. I will use the term localisation in its most commercial sense: a company's strategy to make its goods and services available to several locales in the global market in the terms of these locales.¹⁶ Localisation has taken the world of professional translation by storm. This was particularly evident in the United States, where I began to write these words in the year 2000. Corporate America had been conducting operations in foreign markets for a long time, but the standard operating procedure had been marketing the product abroad ostensibly as 'made in the U.S.A'. With the advent of the internet it became very easy to adapt products and corporate images to the receiving locales. More importantly, corporate America was struck by the epiphany that in the new economy huge profits could be made trading in information; but information must reach the

¹⁶ Obvious references include (Esselink 2000; O'Brien 1998; Pym 2004a).

customers in a familiar form. I will leave the economic and social implications to the specialists; here I intend to present localisation as a large, collective, source-side movement aimed at overcoming semiotic folds. Imagine that our agent is a company based in St. Louis, Missouri which decides to go global. It would translate its website into French, Italian, German and Spanish; set up sales offices and distribution networks in Europe and Latin America; launch an international advertising campaign; perhaps merge with or acquire foreign companies. Its management sees a globalisation strategy, what I see instead is an attempt at **pushing** a highly organised set of signs over the edge that delimits the company's semiotic systems. These systems would include technology, language, corporate culture and image, business practices, the law, etc. Translation-like forms of semiosis are required to negotiate this multitude of folds; some would be traditional—such as translating the verbal content of web pages—others would be highly innovative—such as adapting nonverbal signs to match expectations in certain locales or internationalising goods, services and information in view of their localisation. In this respect, localisation can be considered as a large, coordinated movement of push agents.

5.6.4 Shuffle

Because all things semiotic come in threes, let me complete what seems so far a neat push-pull opposition with a third possible situation. 'Pulling' referred to a desire by a target-side agent; 'pushing' belonged to agents on the source side; how about agents who cannot be clearly located on either side? Of all the spatial metaphors that may give a home to this third category, I will borrow the space Anthony Pym called 'interculture' (cf. Pym 1998, 2002, 2004b). According to Pym, an interculture is a space created by the overlap of at least two cultures and is delimited by two restrictive notions—professional status and 'secondariness'. These notions are linked as follows: "Secondariness here defines professional interculturalities in that the main business of such groups is to work on communication between cultures perceived as primary" (Pym 2004b: 18). Clearly a term like 'secondariness' risks interfering with Peirce's secondness (worse, in (Pym 2002) the term was

precisely 'secondness'); we need to be careful. Although secondary and subaltern to their principals, intercultural agents do enjoy a relative degree of autonomy that Pym described "as the degree to which they can make decisions concerning cross-cultural communication without explicit authorization from other parties or institutions" (Pym 2004b: 20). In my scheme of things, one manifestation of this autonomy is the power to start a fresh strand of T-semiosis. Before giving an example of what intercultural agents can do, let me repeat that by 'agent' I mean a figure that may (and usually does) correspond to several people: an actual translator, an encouraging colleague, perhaps a publisher, etc. How can this multiple figure elaborate the relatively autonomous desire to overcome semiotic barriers through T-semiosis?

Here the illustration will be autobiographical. It's the story of *Balikbayan*, an anthology of Philippine short stories I edited and translated for the Italian market (VV.AA. 1999). It all started in via Veneto, Rome in the spring of 1997, when I overheard a conversation between two ladies. One said "Luisa, did I tell you I hired a Mexican Filipina?" I was shocked. I had been living in Manila for five years then and while I was away 'Filipina' had become synonymous to 'household help' or 'maid'. My fellow country people were building an image of the Philippines as a place whence cheap and cheerful domestics came and this image was likely to prevent them from forming a broader and fairer idea of the country. This is when and where I saw the economic, geo-political and ideological fold rise, and I didn't like it a bit. After I returned home, I began to circulate the story among Manila's writers, scholars and intellectuals, as well as with my maids. During those conversations, someone suggested that I translate Filipino stories and had them published in Italy. This would give evidence "that there are excellent maids in Manila, and excellent writers as well" (Id.: 13, my translation) and this is a feature the city has in common with—say—Lisbon and Rome. So, my desire to poke a hole in the fold rose at the start of the typhoon season that same year. The story rolled downhill from that point on: I spent three months collecting and selecting the originals, a couple more to write first drafts, and two years rewriting them and infecting enough people with the desire to see the book in print. As a proof that the 'intercultural agent' was a collective subject,

let me tell you that the acknowledgment page eventually listed fourteen people, and those were only those ‘without whom this book would not have been possible’ as the formula goes. Even factoring in poor introspection and creative memory, never for a moment did I have the feeling I was on either side of the fold. I am quite convinced to this day I was on both—or neither. I probably reacted to ‘Mexican Filipina’ as an Italian (shame, surprise), as a Filipino (rage, resignation), and as a cultural mediator (‘there may be something interesting here’). Looking for a term with which to label this third and final class of translatorial agency, I propose **shuffle**. I chose it to describe what intercultural agents do because the term does not imply any definite sense of direction. In effect, only three years earlier I had been part of the team that brought out *Daydreams and Nightmares*, a selection of Italian short stories for the Philippine market (VV.AA. 1996). The fact that I was an Italian living in Manila was a crucial qualification for the rest of the team. Intercultural agents inhabit semiotic folds; source and target are much weaker notions to them.

I can almost hear the distant rumble of practicing translators who may read these pages: “here is another brat kid who didn’t need to translate to make ends meet”. It is true I could afford to embark on the *Balikbayan* project thanks to my other jobs. I am also aware many projects are willed into being by people who then treat translators like indentured workers. Stories like mine make up a very small proportion of all translations produced around the world in this moment, so why bother with ‘shuffle’ and the rest? My only answer is that such speculations may contribute to produce helpful descriptive and predictive narratives. In a phenomenology of translating, they may take us to unexplored places. Indeed, what can we gain from this discussion of intention and agency? Firstly, I could confirm the speculative claim that there is such thing as T-semiosis. Translation events and the texts they produce are communicative acts in themselves and can be legitimately used as evidence of beliefs and desires different from those that can be inferred from nontranslated communication. Secondly, we have found a parallel between the characters of the Foundation and translation events: *interpretes*, motives, and strategies closely correspond to similarity, difference, and mediation. Thirdly, the discussion on agency puts translators firmly among the agents of

communication. If it is true that a translator's attitude rarely determines whether a translation will cross a semiotic fold, it is equally true that in principle nothing prevents translators from bringing their *interpretes* desires, their motives, and their strategies all the way up to a project's conception and design stages. As Theo Hermans wrote "all you need is i) something that is available for translation, ii) an assumed benefit; and iii) an enabler that knows how to let the text–sign grow across the fold (ie, an agent with relevant expertise)" (Hermans 2005, private communication). Translators have all it takes to become these professional enablers; they can and should have a say on why, whether, and how translations are made. If this is almost never the case, it is because people—including translators themselves—are not aware of what translators can do, or, worse, because of a deliberate repressive attitude. I hope the present study will help researchers and practitioners recognise this state of affairs and fight back.

6 Five Reasons Why Semiotics is Good for Translation Studies

6.1 Introduction

Before drawing the conclusions of this exploration of the nexus between Peirce's theory of signs and the Foundation of a theory of translation, I would like to run a little test on some of my main findings. This is going to be a second application of my model, more limited in scope than the one based on Relevance theory included in chapter 5. As I did at the end of chapters 2 and 3, this chapter will close with a section that gets into the thick of Peirce's philosophical system.

As we saw in 3.13 above, in 2003 Umberto Eco brought out two books on translation: the one in Italian was titled *Dire quasi la stessa cosa*, which means "Saying Almost the Same Thing"; the one in English was *Mouse or Rat* (Eco 2003a, 2003b). A passage in the opening pages of the former reads:

What does translating mean? We would like the first, reassuring reply to be: 'saying the same thing in another language'. Unfortunately, establishing what 'saying *the same* thing' means is highly problematic. We cannot be sure because of all the operations involved, namely paraphrasing, defining, explaining, and rephrasing; let alone the claims of synonym replacement. Also, looking at a text to be translated we cannot tell what *the thing* is. Finally, sometimes we cannot even tell what *saying* is (Eco 2003a: 9; all translation from this work are mine, the emphases were in the original).

Eco concludes that a translation can never 'say the same thing'; however—he adds—it can say *almost* the same thing: "At this point, the interesting problem is no longer the conception of the same thing, nor that of the thing itself. It is the conception of almost" (Eco 2003a: 10). I will turn Eco's Italian title into a narrative strategy to illustrate five advantages of my semiotic model of translation. I will analyse all the terms in 'saying almost the same thing' and rearrange them to suit my argument.

6.2 *Saying*

I will start my analysis of “Saying Almost the Same Thing” with the term ‘saying’. Eco asked ‘can we tell what *saying* is’? I would like to ask a simpler question: *in how many ways* can we say things? A sense of this question takes the term ‘saying’ as a synecdoche, as when we look at a painting and ask: “What does it say to you?”. Clearly, the painting does not use verbal language to modify our cognitive environment so that we respond in ways intended, desired or foreseen (this view of communication is from Sperber and Wilson 1995: 60–1 and *passim*). A painting and a book say things in different ways because they are different media, and this is the sense of the question I wish to explore.

A concern for different media is fairly new to translators because translating has traditionally been defined as a linguistic operation. A Renaissance treatise on translation reads: *La tradottione non si può fare se non è in lingua diversa da quella che si traduce* (“Translation cannot be done if it is not into a language different from the language one translates”, my translation. Fausto da Longiano 1991 (first ed. Venice, 1556) § 53). This view is still current today. However, if it is true that translators often deal with words, it does not follow that words define translating. Roman Jakobson famously introduced the notion of intersemiotic translation almost 50 years ago (Jakobson 1959). More recently, intersemiotic translation has taken up a more practical sense due to the changes brought to the profession by information technology and the internet. These new forms of translating (especially its variety called ‘localisation’) involve words as well as the nonverbal signs that may appear on a computer screen such as colours, still and moving pictures, and sounds. Partly as a response to the rise of localisation, translation studies discovered ‘multimedia translation’ in the ‘90s (eg. Gambier 1996, 1998; Esselink 2000; Gambier and Gottlieb 2001; and Pym 2004a are more recent contributions). One of the problems raised by ‘multimedia translation studies’ is that each medium says things in its own special way; so, what to do if one needs to make sure that two or more media-rich texts say the same thing? Worse, what to do if two texts need to say the same thing using different media combinations?

This is why I chose to read the term ‘saying’ as *pars pro toto*. Intuitively, ‘saying’ refers to verbal language, but in a general theory of translation its referent should include other kinds of sign as well. **The first reason why semiotics is good for translation studies** is that semiotics is a theory of signs in general, not of linguistic signs. It regards verbal language as just one semiotic system among many—albeit of special importance. To a semiotician, virtually anything is fit to represent, signify, and communicate. Peirce himself was not primarily concerned with how language worked or how people used it to communicate. These issues followed the drift of his deeper currents of thought: ontology, epistemology, logic, and the nature of signs. When confronted with media-rich environments, translators become acutely aware that they need to look beyond words to carry out their tasks and make sense of what they’re doing. In fact, a text’s media-mix itself is an identifiable semiotic feature which in certain cases needs to be interpreted, negotiated and re-enacted on the target side. Theories of translation based on verbal language show their limitations when applied to Multimedia Translation. A semiotic approach better equips translators and scholars to cope with the problems involved. In addition, a semiotic approach throws light on conventional forms of translation as well. There is a sense in which all texts are to some extent multimedia. Even the page you are reading now includes typographical and formatting elements, which are signs in their own right. In most cases, the effect of nonverbal signs on a printed page can be safely neglected by translators. However, nonverbal signs are still there in principle and should be accounted for by a general theory of translation.

Semioticians who developed an interest for translation have been quick to spot the limitations of an excessive focus on verbal language. The main drive of Eco, Nergaard and the other Bologna scholars I discussed in 3.13 and 3.14 above—for instance—can be described as an attempt to generalise Jakobson’s notion of intersemiotic translation, which was limited to represent verbal language by nonverbal means. To these scholars, intersemiotic translation is the representation of signs of any semiotic system by means of signs of any other.

Along this path, semiotics may help us understand the full implications of multimediality for a general theory of translation. One implication regards the very limits of translation. How many sign-systems are actually amenable to translation? One obvious example is Mussorgsky's piano pieces called "Pictures at an Exhibition". In 1873 Mussorgsky lost his dear friend, the architect Victor Hartman. The following year a memorial exhibition of Hartman's works was organised. Mussorgsky planned to draw in music the best pictures, representing himself as he strolled through the exhibition. This suite is a clear example of 'programme music'; ie, a composition that attempts to represent objects and events. Vivaldi's *Quattro Stagioni* is another obvious example. The original printed score included sonnets probably written by Vivaldi himself that seem to clarify in some detail what each movement is supposed to be about.¹⁷ Is there a sense in which one can say Mussorgsky's piano suite 'translated' Hartman's watercolours or Vivaldi's sonnets the *Quattro Stagioni*?

Finally, a semiotic approach may help us better understand such terms as 'medium' and 'semiotic system'. These terms point to a range of referents delimited by two thresholds. The lower threshold is marked by the interplay of our sensory apparatus with the material embodiment of the sign. When we think of painting and music as different media, we do so also because we perceive them through different senses. According to Thomas Sebeok, our sensory apparatus works like a gill, "a special mediating surface which is exposed toward an (as a rule) aquatic animal's environment on the 'outside', and toward its circulatory system on the 'inside'" (Sebeok 1997: 121, n14). An organism's *sensorium* determines the shape and structure of the space where representations of the world would eventually be formed. If the lower threshold is set by our senses, the upper threshold is set by convention. Media are historically construed and demarcated by communities of interpreters. For instance, painting and writing are regarded as distinct—sometimes clashing—media in the West; but they are beautifully mixed into one in the Oriental art of

¹⁷ http://w3.rz-berlin.mpg.de/cmp/vivaldi_op8_1to4_four_seasons.html has both the music and the texts.

calligraphy. This is one reason why I claimed above that a text's media-mix is itself a sign open to interpretation and to translation-like processing.

Reflecting on problems like these may help us question our ordinary assumptions about translation and give translation studies a firmer theoretical basis. Taking the lesson of multimediality seriously suggests that translating is not existentially defined by language. Translating is not something we do *with* words, but something we do *to* words *and* to other signs as well. Along this path, one can hope to identify the sign-actions that are proper to translating and to distinguish them from other forms of sign-action. A semiotic approach can help one trace the edge that separates translating from other semiotic events and behaviour.

6.3 *Thing*

The second term I wish to discuss is 'thing'. Eco asked: 'what is *the thing* of the original?' Because translating is saying almost the same thing, 'the thing' of the original should coincide—more or less—with 'the thing' of the translation. However, if one is to look for what distinguishes translating from other forms of sign-action or semiosis, asking what is 'the thing' of translating would be more helpful. But we need a less impressionistic description of the 'thing' first. Semiotics can frame this problem in interesting ways. According to Peirce's theory of signs, representations do stand for things—commonly known as 'objects'—but the relation between objects and signs is not binary. Objects are part of triads which also include signs and interpretants.

We have seen the elements of Peirce's sign in chapter 2; here I would just like to illustrate the notion of object with the story of the *Constitutum Constantini*, or the Donation of Constantine. As is known, in the Middle Ages, the document was attributed to Emperor Constantine, who ruled between 306 and 337 AD, and was used to legitimate the Church's worldly possessions. In 1440

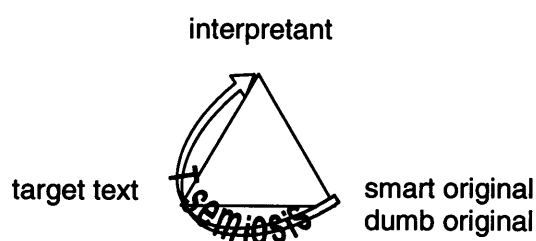
Lorenzo Valla showed that the document was a forgery, probably from the eighth century.¹⁸ Think of Valla's treatise as just one sign and of the Donation of Constantine as its object. The treatise did not materially alter a single word in the older document; so, under this respect, the Donation did not change. But Valla's sign provided a fresh point of view on the Donation which, as a result, produced radically different interpretants. So, pragmatically, the Donation became another text altogether. How can one reconcile this paradox? Peirce's answer is that objects have two sides: "it is necessary to distinguish the Immediate Object, or the Object as the Sign represents it, from the Dynamical Object, or really efficient but not immediately present Object" (CP 8.343, 1908).

Let me repeat a bit of the argument I used in chapter 2. Because sign-action directly involves the immediate object and not the dynamical object, I would like to call the former 'smart object' and the latter 'dumb object'. Smart objects are filtered by the sign through a given viewpoint and are already part of semiosis; dumb objects are natural or cultural entities, they are unknowable in their totality, and are the efficient causes of the sign. This theory of the object is the less impressionistic description of the 'thing' I needed, I can now look for the *thing* of translating I opened this section with. **The second reason why semiotics is good for translation studies** is that the elements of Peirce's sign can help us build a viable model for translation (see 2.2.4 above). Under a certain respect, the source text is a semiotic *object*, the target text is a *sign*, and what the translation signifies to those who receive it is the *interpretant*. Translation can gain a lot from this model because, among other things, it is non-deterministic. Eco's main point—both in his English and Italian books—was that negotiation plays a crucial role in translating. I agree with this insight and I would like to take it a bit further. I believe negotiation can be located at the very core of translation semiosis. On the one hand, the target and source texts negotiate a viewpoint for representation; on the other, the target receivers and the translation negotiate to establish signification. Of course,

¹⁸ Both texts at <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/vallatc.html> 15/7/2004.

unlike Eco's, this is metaphysical negotiation; but I believe a theory of translation must come to terms with its metaphysics. The figure below graphically represents this state of affairs.

Figure 1



We have seen that the 'thing' of translating is a twofold object, itself part of a triad. But it is preferable to look at event-like T-semiosis rather than at static entities such as—eg.—the resulting text. The arrows that appears in my diagrams keep reminding us that semiosis is sign *production*, not the signs produced or involved in the process. Apart from the dumb original—which at any rate is often an event in a prior sign-action—all the elements that appear in figure 1 above are events, not objects. The smart original represents a negotiation between the source and the target texts and depends on the viewpoint that the latter adopts on the former. The target text may result in an object-like entity—eg, a book, a computer game, a TV series—but in the diagram above it stands for the process of translating in its narrowest definition. Finally, it will be easy to see that the receivers' interpretants represent events—eg. reading, killing monsters, watching—in which many people may participate. This means that in translation semiosis 'things' follow events not only empirically, but primarily from a logical point of view. Again, it is important to bear in mind the internal continuity of the triad. These events are distinct and are presented as separate for ease of exposition; but they would not be what they are if they were not part of one and the same strand of semiosis. To paraphrase Short's quotation in 2.3 above: 'Nothing is an original which is not translatable; nothing is a target text that is not interpretable as translating some original; and nothing is a target-receivers' interpretant that does not interpret some text as translating an original'.

I believe this is important for translation studies. The notion of translation has been held captive by its etymology for centuries: *transfere*, ‘to carry across’ (on the history of the word, cf. Folena 1991). The figure is misleading. When you carry a glass across your home, say from the kitchen to the living room, you will no longer find the glass in the kitchen. But when you translate an Italian novel into English, Italians can continue to read it. Clearly, *transfere* is not a good trope for translation. It is true that this trope, like all tropes, shapes and makes possible our thinking about translation; but I maintain that the resulting cognitive horizon is unhelpful. **The third reason why semiotics is good for translation studies** is that it helps us break free of precisely these metaphorical bounds. Translating does not involve transferring words, meaning or what have you like a parcel in the mail. Because the core of translation semiosis is a series of events, the transfer trope does not fit. In my model, the core of translating includes at least the following: collecting information on both the source and target sides; interpreting a source text in view of translating it; negotiating differences; establishing connections and similarities at several levels (or using similarities already established in the past); putting together a target text; and finally making sure that the target text has a valid power of attorney to represent the original. As can be seen, when one translates nothing is transferred, nothing moves. Like all signs, translations happen.

6.4 *The same*

The next term of “Saying Almost the Same Thing” I will analyse is ‘the same’, which points at what is normally referred to in the literature as ‘equivalence’. Equivalence is imperfectly linked to the ‘carrying across’ trope. If you fetch a glass from the kitchen, you would expect to find the very same glass in your living room. The link is imperfect because ‘carrying across’ would be associated with identity, not equivalence. I consider the idea of absolute equivalence as the original sin of Western translation theory. Cicero’s *De optimo genere oratorum* of ca. 44 BC is widely regarded as the earliest glimmer of translation theory in the West (cf. Copeland 1991: 9–36 for a discussion of this foundational text). The text is a short preface to a translation Cicero did of two Greek speeches.

Characteristically, the preface survived to our day while the translations ended up in the dustbin of oblivion. Cicero stated he did not follow the custom to write word for word as he would have done in his capacity as a translator; he chose to write as an orator instead. *Non enim ea me adnumerare lectori putavi oportere, sed tamquam appendere*. “So, I did not consider it necessary for the reader that I count [the words], but that I weigh them, as it were” (V.14, my translation).¹⁹ Even as Cicero offers an alternative, we can infer that word-for-word equivalence between Greek and Latin was regarded as a viable translation strategy in his time.

I would like to show that a strict notion of equivalence is, in fact, a sin. It is a sin of pride or vanity because it rests on an excessive belief in the powers of translation; a degree of confidence that is semiotically unsustainable. I hasten to add that translators can hardly be regarded as sinners. They are in fact victims; in the worst cases, willing victims. Many people—including target receivers, critics, and, most tragically, clients—still expect verbatim equivalence of translators and use this expectation as a benchmark to assess what is lost in translation. In fact, all sign-action—including translating—is incompatible with equivalent relations between its elements; there can simply be no room for them. If an element—say, the sign—were equivalent to the object, sign-action would grind to a halt. Translation semiosis implies a difference between the original ‘out there’ and the original as is represented by the translation. With reference to figure 1 above, this means that a translation-sign can never be a full representation of the original-object; there must always be a residue left for the next sign to use. Therefore, finding a target sign equivalent to the source is impossible; it cannot even be an ideal limit translators should tend to. After interpreting the source sign in view of its translation and analysing the problems it may present, one needs to decide from which viewpoint the target sign will represent it (cf. Eco 2003a: 16–17 for a similar

¹⁹ The current version of this passage in the English-speaking world is from the Loeb edition (Cicero 1949): “For I did not think I ought to count them out to the reader like coins, but to pay them by weight, as it were”. A tradition of interpretation exists that owes more to the introduction of coins and payment than to Cicero’s original positions (cf. Robinson 1997b for an extreme case).

position). Obviously, once the choice is made, other possible and competing viewpoints are excluded, but it would be wrong to conclude that the ‘road not taken’ is a loss. If it were, then something would be lost in all semiosis, because in this respect translating is not different from any other forms of sign–action. As was the case with transfer, the trope of loss does not match the semiotic nature of translating and distorts our very cognitive horizon. The original may still reveal its secrets, but only to the *next* translation (see 2.5.1 above). Most crucially, the residue left in the original is precisely what makes translation possible. What people call ‘loss’ is in fact one of the conditions of translation semiosis. **This is the fourth reason why semiotics is good for translation studies:** like all semiosis, translating happens *because of* the selection of a ground, not *in spite of* it.

6.5 *Almost*

As to the term ‘almost’, Eco added it to ‘say the same thing’ as a quantitative precaution. He asked: “How elastic should this ‘almost’ be?” (Eco 2003a: 10). Again, I would like to take one more step, because translating can be identified among other forms of sign–action on qualitative grounds. The passage from ‘saying the same thing’ to ‘saying almost the same thing’ corresponds to the passage from equivalence to similarity. As I discussed at length in chapter 4, *similarity* is one of the three hallmarks of T–semiosis, together with *difference* and *mediation* (cf. also Stecconi 2004a). Regardless of the variability of translation events and norms in space and time, one could trace the edge of translation semiosis by looking for the possibility of translation in general—ie, for its logico–semiotic conditions. What I found is not a set of positive features that would define translation semiosis in essential and universal terms. The three characters in my Foundation are—so to speak—negative terms that would allow one to decide what translation is not, rather than what it is. Indeed, a positive characterisation of translation can only come from the interplay between the Foundation, translation events, and translation norms. However, this latter description would not be as abstract and all–embracing, because events and norms are in principle historically determined.

This is the fifth and final reason why semiotics is good for translation studies, because it allows us to bring together the three characters of similarity, difference and mediation as the ontological Foundation of translation.

I would like to briefly elaborate on the Foundation's characters. Eco's Italian title confirms that one could not logically speak of translation without assuming some reference to *similarity*. On a practical level, this means that translators use source signs, collateral signs and some notion of similarity to infer target signs. On a general level, it means that translation semiosis aims at producing signs that are similar to other signs organised in a source text (Pym 1992, esp. 37–50). In my model, similarity is neither empirical nor general; it is in fact a potentiality that individuals and communities determine and, in time, turn into translation's established 'equivalences' and norms. Translating also presupposes a significant *difference* between semiotic systems. The most obvious type of difference in translation is the one between natural languages: when a foreigner talks, we don't understand. However, the character of difference, as it is represented in my Foundation, is the mere possibility of such a barrier. *Mediation* is the third character. There are several proofs of mediation as an active force in T-semiosis. In chapter 4 I used as a counter-example an incident in which liaison interpreting broke down because a client addressed the interpreter directly. Another example is that of a translator pursuing her own interests while pretending to relay other people's words (many jokes on translation follow this pattern, the funny part being the breach of confidence). Mediation points at a field of individual actual occurrences. However, the character is general: there would be no translation if the target text did not *speak on behalf* of the source, and that would not depend on any specific set of circumstances. As a trope, 'mediation' opens up a rich metaphorical field: translations have 'power of attorney' from their originals, they represent originals as agents, etc. However, as with all figures, one should use caution. What can go wrong if I say that a translation represents its originals more or less like a lawyer his client? Firstly, not all translations represent one identifiable text-sign from the source side. Their 'clients'—so to speak—may be more than one or even *fewer* than one, as the "Bible portions" available in Bantoanon (cf.

http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=bno). Secondly, there is the case of translating performatives. If a translator ‘speaks on behalf’ of a priest, are you really married when she says ‘I hereby pronounce you man and wife’? Finally, just as the instrument known as ‘power of attorney’ can change according to the different legal traditions, a translation may represent its original(s) in many ways. So, how could one speak of a single and unified notion of mediation? Would it not be better to say that the notion of mediation is culturally determined and drifts in a continuum that stretches through time and space?

All these cases would be problematic for my model if one considered the mediation character as something like a positive norm. But it is not. Mediation, together with the other two characters, is a first: it makes norms (thirds) and events (seconds) possible. If it were a law-like third it could be directly *implemented*. But because it is a first it can only be *materialised*, and each time in conjunction with seconds and thirds. The difference between implementation and materialisation is crucial. For instance, the translation of performatives would be an insoluble problem if one looked exclusively at the character of mediation (and the other two characters in the Foundation). However, in actual occurrences collateral norms take care of completing the felicity conditions of these utterances (or written statements). These norms belong with thirdness and are collateral in so far as they do not belong to the Foundation and therefore do not apply to T-semiosis in general. Many legal documents drawn in one country enter into force in another only after they are translated *and* their translation is certified. These are two distinct speech-acts: a translator is responsible for the former; some other official for the latter. Even if both acts are carried out by the same person (eg, a sworn translator), this person acts in two capacities. The perlocutionary effects of the translated marriage certificate depend mostly on the law-like powers attributed to the second authority or capacity, not on the translator. These powers are thirds and act in conjunction with the act of translating (a second) and with the Foundation characters (firsts), including the character of mediation which allows our interpreter to speak on behalf of the celebrating minister or official.

6.6 Conclusion

I have analysed all the terms in Umberto Eco's title 'Saying Almost the Same Thing' and I have found five reasons why a semiotic model can be good for translation studies. These are:

1. it is a theory of signs in general, not of verbal language;
2. it provides a viable model for the core of translating;
3. it redefines the traditional image of translation as the transfer of object-like entities;
4. it casts new light on equivalence and loss; and
5. it affords an investigation of the logico-semiotic conditions to translation.

The last point is crucial. Three existential characters can be identified for translation semiosis: difference, similarity, and mediation. Together, they can help us frame a fundamental question: "What do we talk about when we talk about translation?"

6.7 Appendix: T-semiosis and continuity

In 6.5 above I wondered what would happen if a Foundation character—namely, mediation—were not a first. Here I would like to see what would happen if the Foundation did not include the character of mediation. A novelist friend once told me he wanted to write a story in which a character would steal a fragment of the Holy Shroud to clone Jesus. He checked the internet and he found that at least one German writer had already used his storyline. Suppose he hadn't checked, would you say his Italian cloned Jesus was a translation of the German one? I believe there is no way to settle this question if you look at the facts alone. But if you looked for strands of semiosis, you could verify the Italian Jesus would not be the product of T-semiosis. This is precisely why mediation is one of the three characters of the Foundation. If my friend had published his novel without checking, you would have had similarity and difference but not mediation, so you could not logically speak of translation. If you score two out of three in this game you still lose, because the

characters are indivisible. In fact, you would reach the same conclusion even if my friend had checked only when his novel was in galley proof. Suppose he panicked and added the phrase ‘tradotto dal tedesco’ on the title page. That would merely have created a pseudo–translation which is unlike a translation for the same reason a rubber duck is unlike a duck: it was never hatched.

Stories like the cloned Jesus are good to dramatise the problem, but simpler lexical items are just as good as examples. Tagalog *salamat po* and Spanish *gracias* have existed independently of each other for centuries. Soon after Miguel López de Legaspi landed in Manila Bay, someone must have noticed they could be used almost interchangeably.²⁰ The items had been there for centuries before anyone could make the inferential link. Before the ships arrived, *salamat po* and *gracias* were each a mere icon of the other. They shared similar qualities and with hindsight we can now describe their relation as the pure potentiality that somebody could *actually* establish it one day. We need to draw a fine distinction here: this iconic relation is a similarity relation considered in isolation and not as one of my three characters. In effect, we cannot even say that *salamat po* and *gracias* were different because difference implies a real relation and the lexical item in Tagalog had never come in contact with the lexical item in Castilian. Let us adopt the viewpoint of the *babaylan* who was sent to meet these tall, stinking men freshly arrived from the sea: how could have she conceived of *gracias* before she spotted the caravels? So, *salamat po* and *gracias* were not even different before 1570, they were only potentially so. Let me add that when the *babaylan* understood that *gracias* had been in use for a long time, she also concluded that the two items had been different before her fateful meeting. But this realisation is dated 1570. The meeting materialised and embodied similarity; it also identified the two expressions in relation to each other. Before the meeting, their common qualities had swum in a continuum; during the meeting, the following happened:

- the continuum was broken,

- two expressions arose and were recognised, and
- they took definite places in a strand of T-semiosis.

To understand this sequence of events, one has to look into Peirce's theory of continuity (cf. CP 4.219 ff., 1897; see also 2.12 above). In that essay—perhaps a lecture on mathematics and geometry—he explains that the parts of a continuum, for instance the points in a line, are 'merged' so that they cannot be identified as individuals. The points that can indeed be identified are those that have a 'defect of continuity', such as the endpoints of a segment and the point in which a line branches out, like the shape of letter Y. But if continuous lines are not made of points, what are they made of? They are made of point-places or loci, and "in a continuous *locus* no point has any individual identity" (CP 4.219, 1897). You can turn these loci into individual points, for instance by cutting a line in two. The cut creates two endpoints, one for each of the resulting half-lines. But when you cut a line in two, you introduce a second dimension: time. Therefore, what gets identified are not points nor loci, but the *pair* composed by the point where the cut was made and the moment when it was made. "If one of the dimensions has a different quality from the other, the couple, consisting of a point and instant on the two dimensional continuum where the bursting takes place, has an individual identity" (Ibid.).

That first meeting between the sailor and the *babaylan* was in all respects similar to the cutting of a geometrical line. It identified, materialised and thus brought into our world of experience some quality. By definition, I cannot describe this quality in itself, but it is close to that which we now know *salamat po* and *gracias* have in common and it is what made the present relation possible. The meeting fulfilled this quality's promise. Its smooth and vague surface was 'burst' and acquired one definite form to the exclusion of all others. It was precisely thanks to such quality that the *babaylan* and the sailor could 'see' that the two expressions were similar, not the other way round.

²⁰ Almost. In fact, you **have** to choose between one of three grammatical forms of respect in Tagalog, whereas respect is only an option in Castilian. *Salamat po* is formal, *salamat ho* is the middle form and

This is a good story to show that equivalence is actualised and declared in the course of T-semiosis.²¹ During that meeting under the coconut trees no word was invented, nor were *salamat po* and *gracias* construed as mutual icons. Let us imagine the scene. The man and the woman probably exchanged presents and each wished to thank the other.²² Suppose the *babaylan* uttered ‘*salamat po*’. The sailor’s behaviour let the *babaylan* know that he could not understand. So, her first feeling (an emotional Interpretant, by the way) was of incomprehensibility—the most intuitive semiotic barrier. By this time, the continuity of icons was already broken. Then the sailor said “*gracias*”; this is when the *babaylan* guessed that *salamat po* and *gracias* could be equivalent. It was a successful inference and a mediating thought dawned on her that would bring everything together. This thought constituted the two existing characters **and itself** into a continuous and indivisible triad which became a translation–equivalence habit soon after. I believe that translation equivalence is bootstrapped by events that have the general form of the *babaylan*’s inference.

Let us now leave the *babaylan* and the sailor. The general lesson we can learn from the story is that the outcome of genuine T-semiosis is neither a sign nor an iconic relation between signs. The outcomes of genuine T-semiosis are:

- The actualisation of iconic relations into real similarities;
- The identification of the terms that will carry them into the world and the recognition of their difference;

salamat is familiar.

²¹ I use the verbs ‘actualise’ and ‘declare’ with the utmost care. Equivalence is actualised because iconism (potential similarity) allows us to find translation equivalence, which is real and existent similarity. It is declared because the move establishes a habit which “may be likened to an imperative command addressed to the future self” (CP 5.477, 1896). It would be interesting to explore the move as a speech act. What kind of act would it be? It is like stating something, promulgating a law, making a promise, or performing a marriage? What perlocutionary effects does it have? What would the felicity conditions be? This would generalise my discussion under 6.5 above.

- The establishment of a new habit.

Please notice that the three outcomes belong with firstness, secondness, and thirdness respectively.

As to the third outcome, let me remind you that a habit is a tendency or disposition to act. The majority of habits resulting from genuine T-semiosis are dispositions to solve translation problems in a certain consistent way upon the stimulus of similar signs and when certain circumstances obtain. These translation problems need not be words—written or uttered. For instance, until recently, part of my job consisted in translating the speeches of a political leader. When I was given a new project, I would invariably ask a series of questions to define the communicative and political setting for myself and the text. This too was a T-semiotic habit that I had established for myself. However, my actual asking and the information obtained were only the practical consequences of my acquired tendency, neither part of the habit nor of the strand of semiosis that had formed it. Semiosis comes to a stop with habit; more specifically with habit-change.

²² They were also lucky: both were familiar with such thing as the act of 'thanking', both performed it using little more than verbal expression, and both felt the expression was appropriate at roughly the same time.

7 Conclusions

7.1 *Seven answers*

We dance round in a ring and suppose,

But the Secret sits in the middle and knows.

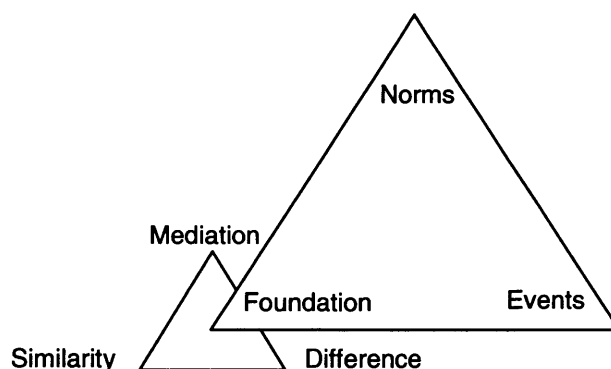
Robert Frost, “The Secret Sits”, first published in (Frost 1942).

I opened this work with a round of questions and hypotheses addressed directly to translating, which was sitting in the middle. Now the dance is almost over; it is time I summarised seven answers that the Secret revealed:

1. There exists a form of semiosis—called T-semiosis—that is specific to translation. This entails that interlinguality is not a defining feature; negotiating meaning and ensuring communication between natural languages is in fact a special case of T-semiosis. To paraphrase Short (3.12 above), this also implies that although T-semiosis cannot exist apart from translated signs (words, images, sounds, etc.), it is not identified with them. Translated signs merely manifest T-semiosis.
2. It is possible to state the logico-semiotic conditions to T-semiosis. These are the characters of similarity, difference, and mediation which, as existential conditions, are related but not affected by the cultural and historical settings in which translating occurs. Together, the three characters constitute the Foundation of translation and can be predicated of all conceivable forms of translation.
3. The Foundation describes translation in potential terms, because it is a general conception that belongs with firstness. A full and positive description of translation requires two more conceptions: events and norms. Translation events are particulars and belong with secondness.

These in turn are regulated by translation norms, which are again general conceptions and belong with thirdness. The resulting picture is a two-layered model:

Figure 1



4. The six conceptions referred to in the above diagram can be used as heuristic tools to trace an edge around T-semiosis. However, one should be careful to distinguish the different roles of the Foundation and its characters, events, and norms. If one wished to use this model to decide whether a given semiotic occurrence is T-semiosis, the Foundation could not give a positive answer, only a negative one. In other words, the Foundation behaves like the magistrate who decides whether a case should be thrown out or heard in court. When the trial does begin, the Foundation must report its conclusions, but the verdict will be passed by a judge (norms) and jury (events).
5. The answers above are applicable to translation per se. The Secret also revealed more detailed features. One such feature is the fact that source and target signs are partly overlapping sets. Originals are always larger than translations and translations are always larger than originals. Far from being a limiting factor, this feature is what makes T-semiosis possible in the first place. This has interesting consequences on the twin notions of equivalence and loss.
6. In an attempt to delimit the domain of the present investigation and to bring it down to earth, the discussion turned to Relevance theory for an approach that would be close in scope and

objective. Relevance theory was found to share a large pragmatic territory with Peircean semiotics and its insights afforded a discussion of the phenomenology of translating, in particular of translatorial intentions.

7. On the evidence offered by the outcome of T-semiosis, one can ascribe three abstract states of mind to the agents responsible for it: a desire to play interprets, motives for individual translation projects, and global translation strategies. These states of mind are another Peircean triad and should be considered together.

7.2 A wave model for T-semiosis

In this final section I will try to show the consistency of these findings and of the model I have built. To do so, I will liken T-semiosis to a wave. I chose the wave as my closing figure because it allows us to concretely visualise the arguments presented in this work, which have tended to be pretty abstract. As with all tropes, however, I need to specify the analogy it is based on, because under a certain respect anything can be like anything else.

When a wave leaves the coast of Dalmatia and reaches—say—Misano across the Adriatic sea, not a single drop of water moves west. Water particles that find themselves in the path of the wave move up and down as the wave goes through. What moves with the wave is in fact energy; the swelling on the water that we can see is only the observable sign of its passage. Ocean waves are one type of mechanical waves, which propagate in a material substance or medium. There also exist non-mechanical waves that can propagate in a vacuum, such as electromagnetic and—it seems—gravitational radiation. To keep my figural field simple, I will disregard this distinction as well as the one between perpendicular and parallel waves. The figural waves I have in mind exist in the semiosphere and carry energy across semiotic folds and through semiotic systems. Eventually the energy is spent to power the form of organised sign-growth specific to translation.

Let us now see how the wave metaphor works as an overarching trope. The present work has argued that semiosis and, by implication, T-semiosis are continuous, as opposed to discrete, phenomena (eg. in 2.2.2). **Continuity** lies at the basis of my research model with ramifications into almost every topic. Waves represent continuity by definition, especially as opposed to the discrete nature of particles. An immediate logical consequence suggested by the wave/particle pairing is a shift of focus **from object-like entities to event-like entities**, which I have stressed often (eg. in 2.2, 3.14 and subsections, and 4.3.1). From the point of view of the agent of semiosis, this implies a shift from a **code-based** to an **inference-based model of communication** (5.3.1). Here again picturing the interpersonal and social interactions in terms of waves yields an intuitive benefit. This is particularly clear in the discussion of **equivalence** (2.6.2), which is presented as the stabilised form of correspondences construed by inferential reasoning between semiotic elements.

The wave image can help to visualise the currents that permeate my two-layered model. Continuity holds each triad together and—because the Foundation is part of the larger triad—there is continuity between the outer and inner shells. If the Foundation (discussed in chapter 4) takes care of the semiotic and logical conditions to T-semiosis in general, other parts of this work explore translation as an actual occurrence. In 2.2.4, for instance, the basic elements of Peirce's signs are used to build a rough-and-ready sketch for translation. A curved arrow appeared in that diagram and in all its subsequent refinements indicating that T-semiosis occurs in one fell swoop. Again, this can be pictured as a wave that originates when an agent involved in the translation process meets a sign on the source side. The wave then propagates all the way until the target signs are released in the target environment. Chapter 2 also deals with translation's non-reversibility (in 2.5.1 and 2.8.1). The wave image can contribute to explain this phenomenon as well: When T-semiosis happens, the energy of the wave is spent; there is no way to reverse the process. I have just used the phrase 'agent involved in the translation process'. I have pointedly chosen this wording for two reasons: one, because most of T-semiosis is teamwork; two—and most importantly—because we

should recognise the intentions and responsibilities of the people it involves (see 5.5, 5.6 and their subsections).

Finally, the wave figure is proposed as an alternative to the **transfer figure**, which I have discussed and criticised in several places (eg. at 3.4, 4.4.2, 5.3, and esp. 6.3). Let us see how the analogy works in detail in this respect. When T-semiosis travels, parts of the semiosphere are excited and respond accordingly just like parts of a physical medium oscillate when traversed by a wave. Nothing else in the semiosphere is displaced, there is no transfer of signs; just like in physical mediums, in which no amount of mass is transported from one place to another by waves. The wave trope may also help explain the long-standing success of the transfer figure and its related image of languages being scattered through space, separated by physical distances, and sometimes perceived as enclosed within national boundaries. It is cognitively easier to visualise translators or their minds moving between codes, meanings being shuffled across semiotic systems, and texts being transferred from one place to another rather than to see the forces that move them; just as it is easier to focus on the surfers rather than on the waves that carry them.

This is not to deny that T-semiosis does involve observable texts, individuals, and relations. When a localisation firm in the States—let's call it Localware—receives a commission from the ACME company, a pretty concrete production cycle is set in motion: Localware's salespeople meet ACME's representatives; a contract is signed (and run through legal); a project manager is assigned to the job; computer and desktop-publishing technicians protect the code, vendors translate the content, quality-control managers check the final result, etc. As this happens, large amounts of bytes physically criss-cross the world, people take planes to meet, money is transferred from one account to another. However, the things and people that travel in the production cycle are to T-semiosis as the swelling on the surface of the sea is to the wave. In general, if one is to look for translation it is better to focus on the energy that propagates through the physical and semiotic medium rather than on the things and people that 'oscillate' in response to it.

Beside showing the consistency of my main findings, the wave model points at new avenues of research. This is a common occurrence when you adopt a new figure: you find more fresh questions than you find answers to the questions you already had. Some characteristic properties of waves are worth exploring. **Refraction** would stand for the feeling of material resistance translators experience at the interface between different semiotic systems; **dispersion** would be linked to the common occurrence of representing one source sign by means of several target signs; **reflection** would account for the effect translation projects have back on the source side. An example of reflection is the portal of the electronic edition of *The Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/DicHist/dict.html>), which informs us that it “also appeared in Chinese– and Japanese–language editions” right in the first paragraph.

Interference is perhaps the most useful analogy provided by the characteristic properties of waves. Let me expand on it using the example of false friends for which I will adopt a very simple definition: words and phrases from different languages that look or sound alike but have different meanings. The literature devoted to false friends is immense, and in it they are consistently identified as one of the thorniest problems of translation. There are countless examples of false friends; for instance, those between some Romance languages and English include the following:

- *libreria* (Italian), *librería* (Spanish), and *librairie* (French) are not ‘libraries’ but bookstores;
- *sensibile* (Italian), and *sensible* (Spanish and French) are not ‘sensible’ but sensitive;
- *apologia* (Italian), *apología* (Spanish), and *apologie* (French) are not ‘apology’ but praise or vindication.

False friends are not unique to translating but a general cross–linguistic feature, also observable in second–language acquisition and use. Moreover, false friends are only part of the phenomena of iconic interference evidenced by translation. For instance, speakers of Romance languages often use structures like ‘It is important to read fiction’ rather than ‘Reading fiction is important’, which is more common in English. This interference effect is brought about by iconic resemblance between

syntactical structures, not words, and the problem is frequency of use (and ultimately idiomaticity), not meaning. With these words of caution in mind, false friends still serve our purpose well, because all translators have fought against the interference effects produced by the iconic resemblance of—eg—(Fr.) *apologie* and ‘apology’. My main point is that interference, common as it is, may describe a phenomenon but does not explain translating in any fundamental way. In the terms of my proposed wave figure, it is like a surfer off the coast of Malibu: interference is nothing more than an observable phenomenon that points towards translation’s wave-like nature. We need to make an abductive move here: if T-semiosis were like a wave, then interference would be a natural (if undesirable) property of T-semiosis. Under this description, interference occurs when a strand of semiosis proceeding from a source sign like (It.) *sensibile* meets another wave that originated from ‘sensible’ on the target side. Because the two semiotic waves are similar enough in certain respects, interference amplifies the wave. In other words, the translator would be misled into believing that because ‘sensible’ and *sensibile* iconically resemble one another, they would also be alike in other respects as well, including meaning. This common logical fallacy would finally persuade her to choose ‘sensible’ as a satisfactory representative of *sensibile* in the actual T-semiosis event she is working on.

Scientists would call this ‘constructive interference’; in contrast, when a crest meets a trough they would speak of ‘destructive interference’ which would diminish the wave’s amplitude. And this is where I stop. I will resist the temptation to use destructive interference as another analogy for translation; analogical arguments are dangerous and one should keep an eye on their relevance at all times. In particular, looking for analogies between waves and T-semiosis is *systematically* dangerous because a categorial difference separates them. Mechanical waves exist in the dyadic realms of physics, acoustic, optics, etc. whereas T-semiosis is triadic and, as such, includes vague characters and non-deterministic rules. Within these limitations, the fact that interference and the other characteristic properties of waves are workable concepts in T-semiosis reinforces my confidence in the wave model.

What argument can I adduce to encourage you to shift from the transfer to the wave trope? Ideally, I would have to show you that the wave trope is better; because the transfer trope has been in circulation for some 19 centuries and you don't change such a venerable image for the sake of it. The pragmatic maxim can be of help: if the 'conceivable practical consequences' of the wave trope are better, than the wave trope is better. We have learned from Peirce that these consequences are either habits—ie, predispositions or tendencies to act—or beliefs, which are intellectual sorts of habits. What are the conceivable practical consequences of adopting the wave trope of translation? These conclusions have already reviewed the intellectual concepts I found in my research work and tried to show that they fall under the analogical domain of the wave figure. I will not go over them again, except for one clarification: I am trying to make the case for serious theoretical work in translation studies, without which I suspect we will not manage to win enough respect for our field of study. I am also following up on the bet I took at the start of chapter 4 (see 4.1): if T-semiosis is an identifiable form of semiosis, then we will need appropriate cognitive tools to explore it. The wave figure is my candidate for this job. I will leave the decision as to whether it is a *good* candidate entirely to the community of inquirers.

I will devote these last paragraphs to the other class of 'conceivable consequences' implied by the adoption of a wave theory of translation: the practical habits of which chapter 5 sketches the theoretical groundwork. These consequences are not dissimilar from the attitudes and sentiments that I have tried to share with my students as a teacher and that were later tested, refined and implemented when my main occupation became translating, writing and rewriting speeches for political leaders. Following the wave figure you can find that translating is about interpreting and making inferences, going out on a limb, taking difficult decisions. In a word, you use the energy the wave T-semiosis brings to your shore to produce your own text; little or nothing of what you do comes directly and non-mediatey from somewhere else. This calls for a clear recognition that the translator is directly on the line, she has her fair share of responsibility, and she claims her position along the agential chain of translated communication.

Both the beliefs outlined earlier and this proposed change in attitude are among the conceivable practical consequences of the wave theory of translation. I hope they are an improvement over the consequences that can be drawn from the traditional transfer trope because they correspond more closely to reality and *therefore* stand a better chance of being true. I hope the arguments I presented in this work find the agreement of the relevant community of inquirers and stand reasonably firm when they are confronted with more facts and observations than I have been capable of finding. I hope it will be some time before someone else comes up with the surprising fact or raises the doubt that will prove them wrong.

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